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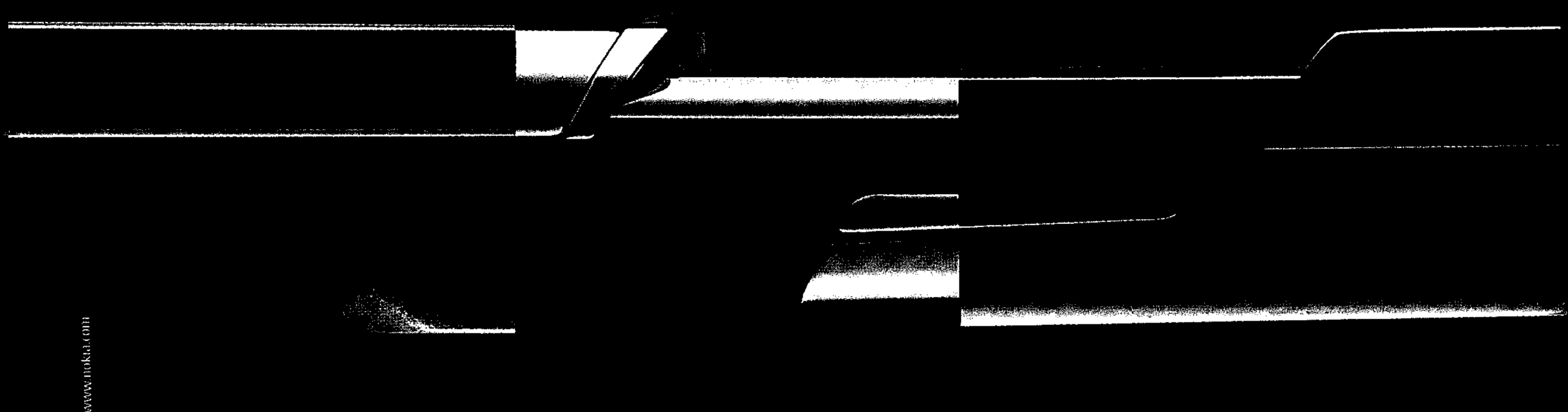

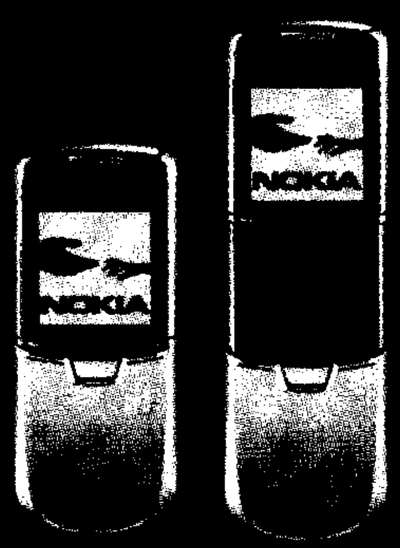

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NOKIA
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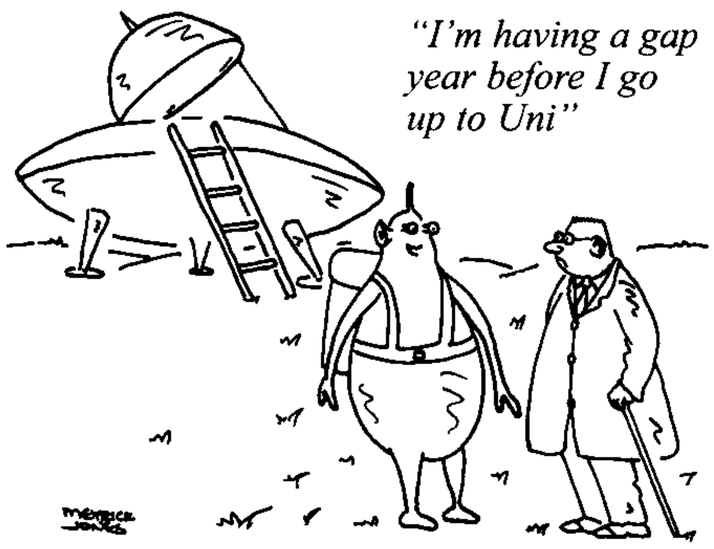
Gnome

AS CHAIRMAN of British Gnomeways, I would like to offer my commiserations to all our customers who have starved to death in Terminal Four at Heathrow Airport.

Let me make clear at once that this is through no fault of British Gnomeways. It is entirely the problem of the caterer, Crapgrub International, who had no option but to sack their workforce who unreasonably refused to work for no money. Crapgrub having offered its staff the opportunity to pack delicious frozen chicken or possibly pork segments and chocolate moussse-style deserts for free, found themselves in the regrettable position of having to lay off the militant Trotskyite troublemakers wearing saris who were formenting dissent and demanding outrageous sums of up to 12p an hour.

However, may I stress again that this is nothing to do with British Gnomeways nor its policy of maximising profits by minimizing catering costs.

Lord Gnome,
British Gnomeways,
Terminal Decline,
Heathrow Airport.



"I'm having a gap year before I go up to Uni"

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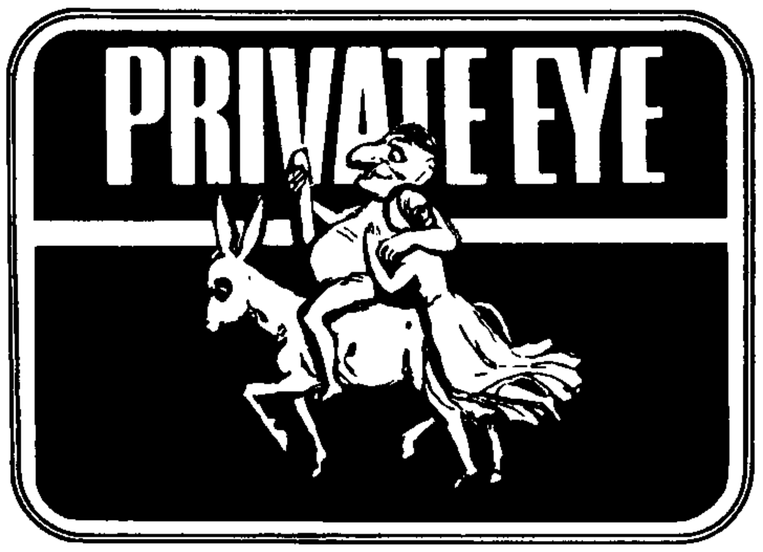


JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

5 August: Prime minister Tony Blair outlines plans to "extend powers to strip citizenship from those individuals with British or dual nationality who act in a way that is contrary to the interests of this country" such as Omar Bakri Mohammed.

9 August: Deputy prime minister John Prescott announces that Omar Bakri Mohammed "has the right to come in and out. That is the circumstances at present and we have to change situations in this country by law."

12 August: Home secretary Charles Clarke bans Omar Bakri Mohammed from re-entering country under existing legislation.

THE government's commitment to slashing red tape continues, with the announcement on 2 August from cabinet office minister John Hutton of a consultation on reform of the public sector ombudsman services.

This will specifically cover the duties of the parliamentary commissioner for administration, the health service commissioner for England and the three local government ombudsmen in England. Hutton wished, he said, to "enable ombudsmen to consult each other and work together on cases and issues that are relevant to more than one of them", and also to "create a modern, responsive and co-ordinated complaints handling service, in effect a 'One-stop shop', which will benefit all those who use our public services."

Exactly how it might be possible for Ann Abraham, who as well as being the parliamentary commissioner for administration is also the health service commissioner for England, to work more closely with herself, Mr Hutton did not specify. No doubt this is one of the matters which will be clarified during the four-month consultation before the government can push through the necessary regulatory reform act which, lest we forget, will "reform burdensome regulation".

THE millions of pounds of taxpayers' money going to the management consultancy McKinsey (which has just dropped the prime minister's chum Lord "Blue Skies" Birt "to avoid any potential misunderstanding"), appears to rise by the day.

The last *Eye* revealed how £9m had gone on home office contracts alone – one to set up a design structure for the disastrous national offender management service, or Noms, shortly before Birt left his wife for Noms' former "change director", Eithne Wallis.

Questions from Lib Dem MP Norman Baker have now shown that during the time Birt and three other former McKinsey consultants have been at the heart of Downing Street, McKinsey has secured a wallet-bulging £53m worth of work (and rising) on 15 defence contracts. By far the biggest is worth £22.8m for "consultancy support for the strategic partner to the DLO transformation programme" – a big reorganisation of how defence equipment and supplies are stored and distributed.

Amazed by the huge sums revealed, Mr Baker is set to ask other government departments how much they are paying McKinsey.

Holiday relief...

■ **Knackerwatch: News of the screw-ups** 7
■ **Eye TV: House of ill repute** 10
■ **Lambeth's £1m golden goodbye** 11
■ **Robin Cook: The Vicar's tribute** 18
■ **Labour's best-connected lobbyists; the NHS scan scandal; Rio Tinto gets cuddly: In the back** 26-28

Number crunching

50%	■ Drop in students taking A levels in French or German in the past decade
500%	■ Increase in students taking media studies A level in the past decade
84.2%	■ Pass rate in 1995
97%	■ Predicted pass rate in 2005

MI5's decision to open a "regional office" in Cardiff for up to 11 officers is causing a stir in Whitehall.

The spooks hope to recruit agents who are able to operate "inside the Muslim community", but they face an extra hurdle. The UK is a signatory to the European charter for regional or minority languages, and as a result, every document collected must first be translated from the original Arabic, Farsi, Dari or whatever into Welsh – an expensive additional burden on MI5's resources.

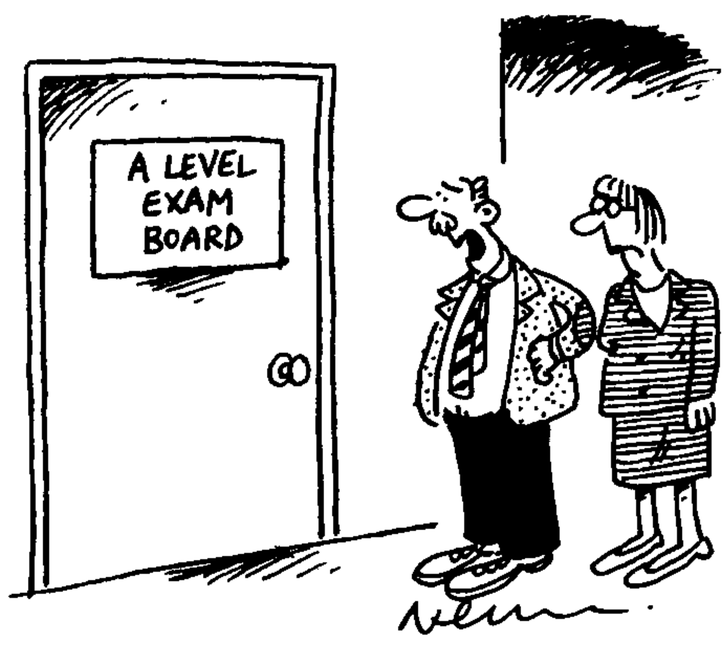
JUST FANCY THAT!

"The greatest thing to come out of this for the world economy, if you could put it that way, would be $20 a barrel for oil. That's bigger than any tax cut in any country."

– *Rupert Murdoch, speaking to the Australian news magazine* The Bulletin *in February 2003, in support of the plan to invade Iraq.*

"Crude futures climbed to a record high of $65 a barrel in New York overnight, lifted by… security concerns in the Middle East."

– The Times online *(prop. R. Murdoch) 11 August 2005.*



"They don't know their pass from their elbow"

Street Of Shame

LIKE many other papers, the *Guardian*'s lead story on 8 August concentrated on the proposed prosecution of Islamic clerics who incite treason. Or did it?

Although the first five paragraphs of the story covered comments from the attorney-general and director of public prosecutions, nearly two thirds of the article were devoted to how "the *Guardian* has also learned that a radical Muslim group, Hizb ut-Tahrir, which the prime minister intends to ban… is not involved in violence or terrorism."

Proudly trumpeting the fact that "two of Labour's four Muslim MPs told the *Guardian* that they oppose banning Hizb ut-Tahrir" (and ignoring the fact that this meant an equal number didn't), the paper quoted extensively from a leaked government document which maintained that "membership or sympathy with such an organisation does not in any way pre-suppose a move towards terrorism".

But hold on! Doesn't that mean that the *Guardian* had no grounds for sacking its trainee Dilpazier Aslam because his "membership of the organisation was incompatible with his continued employment by the company", as it announced last month? Or does it just mean that the paper is tying itself in knots trying to justify whether or not he should have been fired, with opposing factions desperately throwing contradictory motions around at heated NUJ meetings?

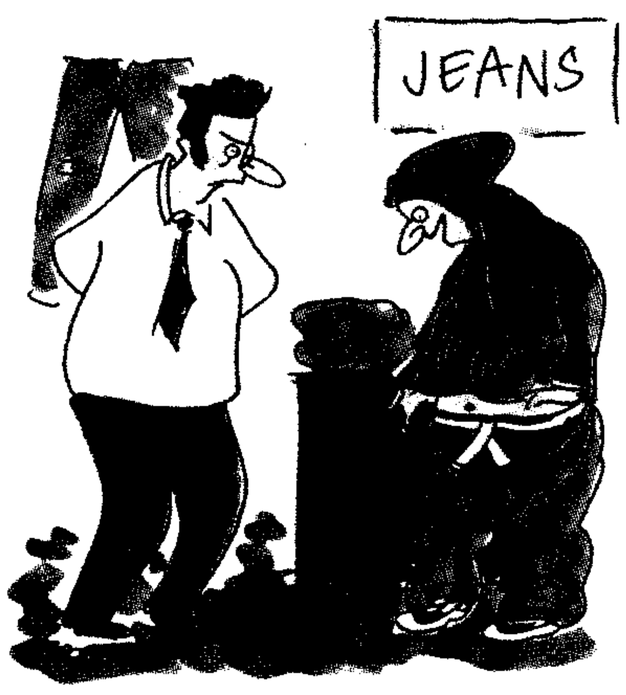
Perhaps executive editor Albert Scardino, who was responsible for the training scheme which recruited Aslam, could shed some light behind the headlines in his regular slot reviewing the papers on Sky News – or perhaps not, since a week after the trainee was sacked, it was announced that Scardino would be "leaving to pursue a variety of news and entertainment projects" too.

READERS of the *Mail* may have noticed a certain fixation with Prince Charles's crown. On 8 August Robin Yapp had a pressing question: "Is [Prince Charles' hair] a weave, or is it a transplant?"

The eagle-eyed hack had spotted that Charles seems to be sporting a fuller head of hair recently, especially when compared photographs taken of him in July. Back then the Prince appeared to be a little thinner on top, "like so many men of his age."

Who could he mean? It's a little-known fact that *Mail* editor Paul Dacre (who is bald) and Prince Charles were born on the same day: 14 November 1948.

One man who is aware of this fact is, er, Paul Dacre, who has been repeatedly overheard asking his executives whether he or the Prince looks better for their age. Getting his paper to investigate Charlie's baldness seems a little sneaky given that his own hair is hardly apparent.



"These fit perfect – I'll take them!"

THE *Sun* – once notoriously convinced that Liverpool fans routinely attempted to kill people before urinating upon them and picking their pockets – was equally emphatic in its belief that Liverpool supporter Michael Shields was innocent, despite his conviction in Bulgaria for throwing a paving slab so hard at a man that his skull was split open and he suffered brain damage.

"We want you to sign the petition below demanding immediate release for Michael, 18, jailed for 15 YEARS for attempted murder – even though another fan confessed to the crime," the paper demanded on its front page, above a cut-out-and-send slip helpfully addressed to president Georgi Purvanov of Bulgaria, c/o the *Sun*'s offices. As copies flooded in, the paper kept up the pressure – on 3 August its front page shrieked that "5,000 SUN READERS BACK FAN MICHAEL".

So what did the paper make of the news three days later that the Bulgarian police had ruled that the witnesses who picked Shields out in an ID parade were actually correct, and the confessor, a charming young man by the name of Graham Sankey, had actually slammed a half-brick into the head of someone entirely different that evening? Er, not a lot. The paper buried the news in a 70-word paragraph on page 15, under the mild headline "Jail fan's setback."

President Purvanov should not expect any mail bags from Wapping any time soon.

Hotel Description: ...Our 4****-First-Class certificated Hotel has a charming and very hostile staff who like to make you feel comfortable in our house...

Hotel Landhaus Alpinia, Berlin

"STUPID PAULA" shrieked the *Sunday Mirror* on 31 July, quoting Liz McColgan's view of her fellow long-distance runner Paula Radcliffe, who had declared her intention to run in both the marathon and the 10,000 metres at this year's world championships.

Beneath an "exclusive" banner, hack Steven Downes revealed that "McColgan, who won the 10,000m world title in 1991, has branded the decision to double up at a major championships as 'stupid'."

Indeed she has – more than two years ago, in fact, when she was asked whether Radcliffe might attempt both races at the Athens Olympics. The quotes Downes attributed to McColgan in the *Sunday Mirror* – "The standard is so high and the Ethiopians are so good on the track that I think she would be stupid to do both… She must concentrate on her strongest event – the marathon – and go and get that medal," were lifted from an interview which McColgan gave to the BBC in May 2003, which is archived on the corporation's website.

As McColgan angrily clarified last week: "I'm furious. I haven't spoken to anyone about the world championships. I have not even spoken to a single newspaper journalist about Paula's prospects. I am fed up with people trying to make out that I am critical of Paula. People will think I'm a jealous old hag. It's pathetic that anyone would misrepresent me."

THE revelation that one of the London bomb suspects managed to escape to Italy without having his passport checked dominated the front page of the *Evening Standard* on 1 August, with government sources telling the incredulous paper that "an internal home office inquiry has been launched into how Hussain Osman escaped on the Eurostar".

It was only as the third edition of the paper was going to press that the executives realised their splash sat rather uneasily with the special offer they were launching that day with a large promotional banner across the top of the front page: "Return Eurostar Breaks from only £99 per person." It was quietly dropped.

OUT OF CON-TEXT

"WONDERFUL – *Daily Mail*", shriek the boards outside the Wyndhams Theatre where tabloid favourite Sienna Miller is currently appearing in *As You Like It*.

To clarify, what critic Quentin Letts actually said was this: "All the knowing innovation finally proves too much in David Lan's arch-casual direction... Shakespeare's wonderful story is near indestructible but the aftertaste here is of tinny, modernistic zeal."

"MANY leading businesses use a national rate phone line at 10p a minute," declared Richard Desmond last autumn when he switched all phone numbers at the *Daily* and *Sunday Express* to lines which would pull in a profit for his coffers.

In case callers are in any doubt, those who fork out to be put on hold by the *Express* switchboard are now entertained with a lengthy message reminding them just what a "leading business" they are trying to get through to. "Welcome to Northern and Shell Networks, a powerful force in world-wide media", a recorded message declares, before going on to give full details of a number of the brands which provide that global power.

Curiously, although callers are treated to interminable plugs for the likes of *Happy Magazine* – "completely devoted to shopping!" – the message does not list the divisions which bring in the bulk of the £52m that Mr Desmond paid himself last year: Television X, Red Hot Rears, 40+ Wives, Only 18 or his eight other hardcore pornographic subscription TV channels.

Presumably you have to ring an even more expensive phone line to hear about those.

Northern and Shell's on-hold entertainment is at least more appropriate than that of the Co-Operative Insurance Society, however. Those calling CIS to notify it of a claim on a life insurance are given the chance to listen to, among others, an instrumental version of the Badfinger (and later Nilsson) song "Without You", meaning that as they ponder their recent bereavement they can sing along with its chorus: "I can't live, if living is without you / I can't live, I can't give any more…"

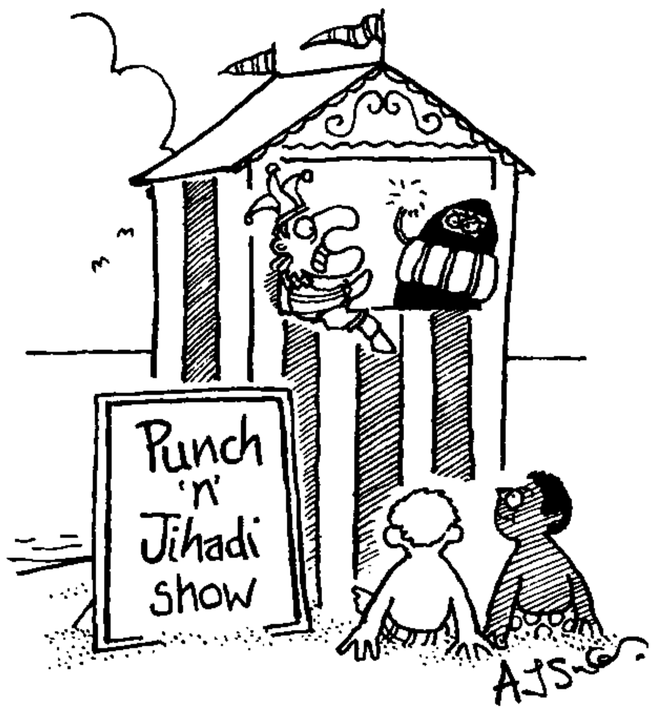
RICHARD DESMOND isn't shy of blowing his own trumpet: his generous donation of a week's wages to the starving of Africa was splashed on the front page of the *Daily Express* on 4 August, with a further two-page spread inside applauding the proprietor's "fantastic gesture".

But even Dirty Des's generosity has its limits. Before he took over Express Newspapers, there was a "matched giving" scheme which allowed *Express* staff to make donations to charity direct from their pay packet – donations that were then matched by the company. Not any more: he axed the scheme as soon as he bought the titles.

In the same week that he was pouring $100m into the launch of the US edition of *OK!*, and giving a week's wages to the dying of Africa, Dirty Des flew to his impressive Mallorcan villa for a well-earned break. Private jet? British Airways first class? Not a bit of it. Easyjet from Luton with the tattooed, unwashed masses. He may be a squillionaire but he just can't resist saving a few quid.

AT THE City HQ of the *Daily Express*, editor Peter "Mentally" Hill has been venting his opinions of the new security measures put in place since the London bombings.

A polite request to search the boot of his car at the car-park checkpoint resulted in a withering tirade of abuse. "If I was going to smuggle a bomb into the building I would strap it to the underside of the car, not put it in the fucking boot," he spat. And presumably it would have been a smart bomb. After all, the diminutive Mr Hill drives a Smart car.



WHAT was it that convinced executives at the *Mail on Sunday* that Martin Clarke was the right man to oversee the unlikely relaunch of the paper's *Night and Day* supplement as a weekly lad-mag?

Was it his keen interest in sport, as evinced by the curious "25 ways to get over this nightmare" with which he filled *Ireland on Sunday*'s editorial page after England's victory in the rugby world cup, despite the fact that Clarke is as English as Jonny Wilkinson?

Was it perhaps the red-blooded heterosexuality evinced by his fervent campaign as editor of the *Daily Record* to retain the gay-bashing clause 28 in Scotland, a crusade so successful that it was a major factor in his sacking not long after the law was rescinded?

Or maybe his well-documented interest in boozy boys' nights out, epitomised by the incident when as *Scotsman* editor he waved a £50 note in the face of an unimpressed Edinburgh bouncer and told him that "if you don't fucking let me in, this £50 says I'll have this place closed down in a fortnight".

Or perhaps it is his robust views on the fairer sex, which involve a fondness for the use of the C-word in the workplace that rivals that of his mentor Paul Dacre, and a management style which prompted a spate of resignations when he took over the helm of *Ireland on Sunday*. No doubt all of these will be in evidence when the all-new *Nuts and Day* launches in the autumn.

SUE "Glenda" Carrol delivered an invaluable insight into the break-up of celebrity ex-wife Sadie Frost with her 24-year-old boyfriend in the *Daily Mirror.*

Their split was apparently, "pretty obvious to the rest of us a week ago when she made an appearance in a skin-tight, see-through 'come and get me' dress which left nothing to the imagination." And indeed, as the picture accompanying her column showed, her single status could not have been more obvious. Not least because the paper had carefully cropped the 24-year-old, who had been standing happily beside Frost at the time, out of it.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"How galling for Simon Hopkinson, whose book *Roast Chicken and Other Stories* has been voted top of a poll of the 10 most useful cookery books, to be referred to as 'unknown' by at least two of the tabloids. I mean, you can understand it from the *Mail*, but *The Times*...? Far from being unknown, Hopkinson is one of the most influential figures in modern British cooking."

– Rachel Simhon, *Daily Telegraph*, 30 July, p23.

"After eight months on top of Amazon's best-seller list, J. K. Rowling was yesterday dethroned by a relatively unknown food writer. Simon Hopkinson rocketed to number one..."

– *Daily Telegraph*, 30 July, p9.

KNACKERWATCH

News Of The Screw-Ups

WRITING the most reactionary column in the *News of the World*'s history is obviously not especially time consuming for Lord Stevens, former commissioner of the Metropolitan police. For, as well as seeking lucrative private sector directorships and chairing an Interpol committee, "the chief" is also continuing his seemingly interminable investigations into the death of Princess Diana and the murder of IRA lawyer Pat Finucane.

Amazingly, Stevens started the latter inquiry in 1989 and has yet to reach a proper conclusion. Any progress so far has relied on outside help, notably a BBC *Panorama* programme in which a loyalist thug called Ken Barrett claimed to be one of Finucane's killers, after first being paid a four-figure sum for "expenses" by reporter John Ware.

Subsequently nicked by Stevens, Barrett initially pleaded not guilty, saying he'd only boasted about being involved in the killing to make some money. Then, realising he would probably be covered by the Good Friday prisoner release scheme, he decided not to bother with a trial and changed his plea. Last September he was convicted of murder and sentenced to 22 years, but will in fact be back on the streets by next year as one of Belfast's famous community gangsters, er, workers.

This unusual sequence of events has hardly been seen as a triumph for dogged policing, not least because it avoided any evidence being heard in open court. Undaunted, Stevens has come up with another Keystone Kops scheme: he is trying to force *Times* correspondent David Lister to identify one of his sources. Inevitably Lister isn't going to do this, and so the usual threat of imprisonment is being dangled over his head by ex-Commissioner Knacker, although not without considerable, self-inflicted difficulty.

Last month the Stevens team initiated a court case against Lister and his co-defendant Hugh Jordan, a hack on the *Sunday World* in Dublin. Stevens wants both reporters to identify a pseudonymous source quoted in their 2003 biography of the loyalist drug-dealer and steroid-fiend, Johnny "Mad Dog" Adair, even though Adair was only peripherally involved in the Finucane affair. Naturally, they must also hand over their notebooks and any tape recordings which the police might find useful, assuming they haven't already burned them.

Alas! Stevens brought his case in Belfast county court – generally used to settle small debt claims – rather than the crown court, which is where PC Plod has to go if he wants to threaten people with imprisonment unless they betray their sources. Stevens's blameless brief, Bernard McCloskey QC, had to plead with the presiding judge to let the case go ahead anyway, despite his client's inability to tell one court from another.

Not surprisingly Judge Tom Burgess laughed this out of his court, forcing milord Stevens to resubmit the action before the correct bench now that the holidays in Ulster are over. The taxpayer will of course have to pick up the tab for this incompetence, with the reporters' costs for the abortive action being added to the Met's own legal bill. As proceedings drag on, however, the publishers of the Adair biography face escalating costs as do the two writers, while Stevens can simply shrug off the heavy financial consequences of his action.

He almost certainly knows the identity of the loyalist who talked to the hacks anyway, so the whole costly rigmarole is pointless. He simply lacks enough evidence to bring charges, and it's hard too see how – even in the unlikely event that Lister and Jordan finally crack – journalistic hearsay could possibly be enough to change this. But going to court does enable Lord Knacker to give the illusion that he's doing something useful, despite regular complaints from the Finucane family to the contrary.

Quite what view Rupert Murdoch will take if one of his staff is eventually carted off to the cells for defying one of his columnists remains to be seen. Adding to the bizarre nature of this case is that, as the *Eye* reported at the time, Stevens's employers at the *Screws* actually endorsed Adair as a "peace candidate" on the front page of their Ulster edition during the last Northern Ireland assembly elections, arguing that he was a reformed character and should be supported at the polls. Unfortunately Mad Dog was sent back to prison before polling day, so his candidacy tragically failed to get off the ground.

"DIRECTORS' pay at Britain's top companies climbed an average of 16.1 percent last year – four times faster than average earnings and eight times the rate of inflation," thundered the *Guardian*'s front page on 4 August.

To ram the point home, the *Grauniad* added that "average earnings are rising at 4.1 percent and the average annual salary is £22,060. An average chief executive is paid 113 times more than an average UK worker."

On the very same day, a media company announced that its directors' pay had increased by 37 percent, even though its two flagship brands had lost nearly £50m between them. Of this glaring example of boardroom avarice, the *Grauniad* chose only to file a brief report on page 20, the last sentence of which casually mentioned the inflation-busting increase. The company in question was, er, the Guardian Media Group.

THE continuing investigation by ex-Met chief Lord Stevens into the various conspiracy theories surrounding the death of Princess Diana continues to provide the *Daily Express* with excuses to splash lurid claims on its front page, attached to stories that bear very little resemblance to them.

"DIANA MURDER RIDDLE" shrieked the front page on 28 July, directing readers to page five where they could read exactly the same story that was in all the other papers – that the car in which the princess died had been shipped to Britain for forensic examination. Four days later, after reports elsewhere that Stevens had found "no evidence to contradict the French findings that Diana died as the result of a simple road traffic accident", the paper splashed with an even more astonishing claim: "DIANA WAS PREGNANT".

The headline inside the paper clarified this slightly: "AN INQUEST WILL PROVE DIANA WAS CARRYING MY SON'S CHILD." Yes, once again, the paper's sole source was the fantasising pharaoh, Mohammed Fayed, who told hack Padraig Flanagan for the umpteenth time that any theories that contradicted his imminent grandfatherhood "can only have been prompted by the security services who are clearly very nervous about positive findings the investigation is uncovering."

How nice that since the departure of Piers Moron – who justified his constant promotion of Fayed's loopy theories in the pages of the *Mirror* on the grounds that "I've made it a strict rule in life to ingratiate myself with billionaires" – the phoney pharaoh has found himself another Fleet Street cheerleader in *Express* editor Peter "Mentally" Hill!

LOBBYING by firms hungry for a slice of the ID cards pie is stepping up a gear.

The Fabian Society meeting last month at which home office minister Tony McNulty admitted the ID card idea had been "oversold" was very widely reported. But no paper noted that the event was paid for by **Unisys**.

Unisys is certainly keen to pick up ID card work. The previous month it sponsored an ID card procurement meeting addressed by Katherine Courtney, the home office official in charge of the scheme.

The firm claims to be a "world leader" in the field of ID cards, yet it has had problems in Panama where it had a multimillion dollar deal to make cards for the central American state. In 2002 Panama's electoral commission cancelled the four-year contract and sacked Unisys after a Colombian national was found illegally holding 500 blank cards. Unisys admitted it too had 30,000 blank cards, all of which should have been handed to the Panamanian government.

While the electoral commission dismissed rumours that the blank cards were part of a voting fraud or drug crime plot, it terminated the contract citing general security concerns. Unisys responded by suing the Panamanian government. It is understood an out-of court settlement was reached.

Meanwhile **Siemens** has had an early success, recently winning a £6.9m contract to make software for the "authentication by interview" process. This is a Passport Office contract under which all new first-time passport applicants will get a face-to-face interview. The home office says this may be a "building block" for ID card enrolment.

Siemens has a long history of work with the home office, including notable cock-ups at the Passport Office and over asylum administration. Luckily the firm had the good sense to hire Sovereign Strategy (see Sovereign Power alongside). It also makes regular donations to Labour and funds the Labour-connected think tank, the IPPR.

Meanwhile ID card hopeful firm **ATOS Origin** (see *Eyes passim*) has kept up its charm offensive, paying for a special supplement on crime-fighting computers in the *New Statesman*. On the plus side, Atos Origin boss Paula Sussex got to sit in on a round table with junior minister Harriet Harman, and the firm spread its glossy techno-babble laden advertisements over one of Labour's favourite mags.

On the minus side, this meant Atos Origin funded an article by regular *Statesman* contributor Nick Cohen listing the home office's many IT failures and the millions that have been wasted on computer cock-ups. Cohen suggested that the £6bn cost of ID cards might be "better spent employing more police and intelligence officers".

Atos also attracted bad publicity with the revelation that its ID card bids are being led by Phil Chalmers. He has good Labour party connections, having been Donald Dewar's spin doctor. However, he resigned from that job in 2000 after police found him in a car in Glasgow's red light district, over the limit and accompanied by a heroin-addicted prostitute.

Number crunchings

650 ■ Number of catering staff at Heathrow sacked by Gate Gourmet to "resolve financial crisis"

£6,500,000 ■ Amount spent by Gate Gourmet boss David Bonderman on his birthday party three years ago

GRAVE ROBIN

LIKE most of the papers on 7 August, the *Sunday Express* devoted half its front page to the news of Robin Cook's death from a heart attack while hill walking. The other half was filled with a huge ad for that week's free CD of "Classic Love Songs". And which particular hits were singled out as special highlights directly adjacent to the headline? "Walk On By" and "What Becomes of the Broken-Hearted".

● The *Daily Mail* took great pleasure over the years in chronicling the thoughts of Margaret Cook on her former husband, interviewing her on several occasions about how her husband was a drunken philanderer whose father would have disowned him were he alive, and how her subsequent lover had made her realise that "sex could be so good".

So, in the wake of his untimely death, what did it make of her dignified statement that he had been an "exemplary father" and a "truly moral" man, and her promise to respect Gaynor Cook's wishes over her attendance at the funeral? The paper buried them on page 12, choosing instead to fill most of the front page and a further spread inside with the lurid headlines: "The Agony of Gaynor: She's fallen apart, says Robin Cook's ex-wife... The mother of his sons tells how Gaynor is struggling to cope with the tragedy: 'She is not a strong person and she always needs looking after,' she said."

● "Robin Cook may easily have been the cleverest man in modern British politics," declared Trevor Kavanagh in the *Sun*. "He was also one of the kindest. He was a beguiling and persuasive speaker, capable of arguing black was white and convincing many of his listeners that it was so."

So it was presumably another Robin Cook whose picture the paper printed on a dartboard in April 2003, inviting readers to "aim your own missiles at the cowards and traitors who opted to support Saddam Hussein."

Cook's face appeared alongside those of Clare Short and George Galloway. As the paper incredulously declared: "These are the people who wrongly told us that war would last months, the Iraqi people did not want it and many thousands of civilians and coalition soldiers would die." What a bunch of thickies!

● "Robin Cook was a rarity among politicians – a beacon of integrity and hounour," declared an editorial in the *Daily Mirror* last week.

"When Robin found real love with Gaynor, many thought they had the perfect weapon to undermine him. But he rose above them and the shabby way he had been treated." Indeed he did – in fact, he even forgave the paper which in 1998 bought up the lurid claims of his sacked diary secretary Anne Bullen about him having "sex at the tax-payers' expense" with his then mistress, and tracked down and exposed another lover of the "love-cheat MP" despite the fact that their affair had ended a full 20 years previously. The name of that newspaper? The *Daily Mirror*.

DAVID Blunkett, the new work and pensions secretary, boasted last month that more and more elderly people were benefiting hugely from the chancellor's pension credits scheme.

He said that by last March, 2.7m households were being "helped out of poverty" by credit payments, which guarantee those over 60 a minimum income of £109.45 a week, or £167.05 for couples.

All very laudable: but is the 2.7m figure correct? And how did his department (DWP) calculate it? In the months leading up to the general election, and amid concerns that TV advertising wasn't persuading pensioners to apply for the credit, pension staff were seconded into what was called a "Pension Credit Scan (PCS)" – phoning pensioners around the country to see if they qualified for credits.

The target set for staff who were calling up to 50 pensioners a day was indeed 2.7m. But as those seconded to the "Scam" soon learnt, most old people were very suspicious of people who called out of the blue (not least because government literature in Post Offices warns them about the danger of identity theft) and even more reluctant to divulge personal details over the phone.

More importantly, it soon became obvious to staff that the vast majority did not qualify. One worker told the *Eye* that of the 1,100 pensioners he called in four weeks, only nine (less than 1 percent) resulted in application forms being sent out; and of those two were to people who did not qualify but who wanted a form anyway.

Staff, frustrated that backlogs and problems were building up, told the *Eye* they believed it was an impossible target unless dead pensioners were included in the count. They said that when the DWP received notification of a death, it "suspended" payments but the names of the dead were left on the system for some time. With hundreds of pensioners dying each day, it is easy for the figures to become skewed and – hey presto! – the magic target of 2.7m is achieved.

SO MUCH for "joined-up government". On 1 August Baroness Young, chief executive of the Environment Agency, talked of a clamp-down on small businesses that pollute.

Naming and shaming and the use of anti-social behaviour orders (Asbos) were being added, she said, to the normal prosecution powers ranged against those who flout environmental regulations.

Small and medium-sized businesses were responsible for about three-quarters of commercial and industrial waste, she said, yet a staggering 94 percent of them were ignorant of their legal obligations.

Well, they might just as well remain ignorant. For only two days earlier it had emerged that the government was proposing to remove those very same pollution controls from thousands of small businesses as part of its deregulation strategy.

Not only does this undermine completely the efforts of Baroness Young and the Environment Agency, according to environmentalists, but it completely undermines the government's own targets on air quality.

IRAN GOES NUCLEAR

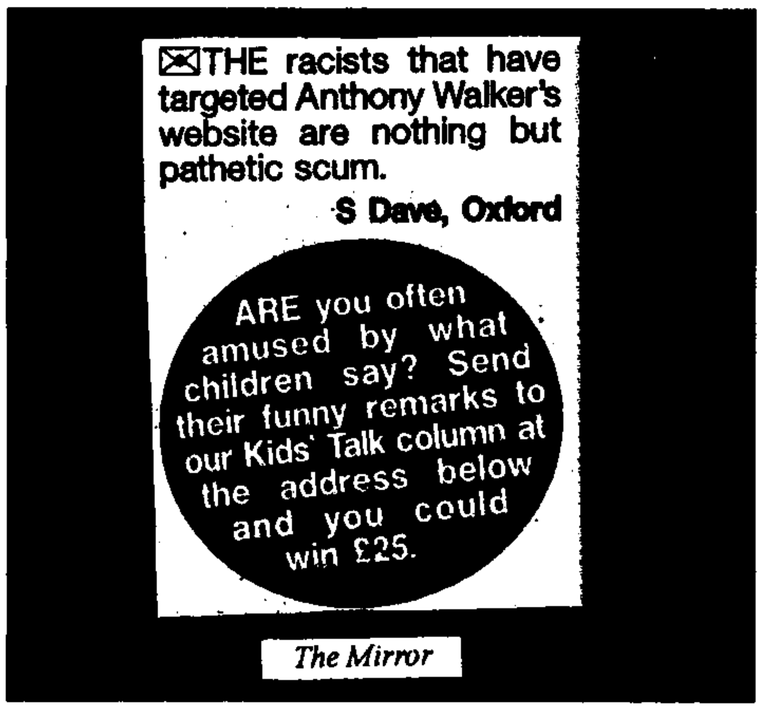
THERE has been zero press coverage of last *month's* report on the Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre by chief inspector of prisons Ann Owers. This may be because home office minister Tony McNulty professed himself "pleased" by it – not very newsworthy. He claimed Owers had found great "improvements" since her previous report on Harmondsworth in 2002, which was unremittingly grim.

Er, up to a point. In 2002 Owers had "serious concerns" about the privately run detention centre, which experienced a riot last year. This time, while noting some improvements, she insists that "fundamental concerns remain".

It seems fundamental concerns bother ministers a lot less than serious ones. Unlike every other report by the chief inspector of prisons, the latest Harmondsworth document was kept off the home office website, along with its criticism of the government's "fast-track" removal policy. Under this policy, asylum-seekers are interviewed and receive a final decision within three days – whereupon 99 percent are refused. Owers claims they are often deported "without being able to access competent and independent legal advice". Some who did have access to legal advice then lost it when they were forcibly moved to a different part of the country.

Owers is also concerned about possible assaults on asylum-seekers by their private escorts. Harmondsworth is run by UK Detention Services, but prisoners are escorted by Global Solutions Ltd. She finds it "of particular concern that, despite our recommendations in the last report, there was still no clear protocol to ensure that detainees subject to failed removals, who returned to the centre, were medically examined and any injuries recorded and passed on to the relevant authorities to be monitored and if necessary acted on". Her report says the immigration service should "urgently put in place such a system".

As the minister does not acknowledge these recommendations in his "official response", and given his determination to look on the bright side, it seems unlikely the government will do anything about them.


✉THE racists that have targeted Anthony Walker's website are nothing but pathetic scum.
S Dave, Oxford
ARE you often amused by what children say? Send their funny remarks to our Kids' Talk column at the address below and you could win £25.
The Mirror

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

A SUCCESSFUL specialist teaching service helping children who cannot attend school is to be closed in order to meet government targets.

The REOTAS (Reintegration and Education Other Than At School) unit in Scarborough supports 148 teenagers who are either excluded from school for bad behaviour or who cannot attend for other reasons such as illness. Every youngster gets several hours of individual or small group tuition a week, plus learning materials. REOTAS has had good results, with 60 children gaining GCSEs last year, despite the problems which kept them out of class.

Despite the success of the REOTAS approach, the department for education and skills targets are for pupils to be managed within mainstream schools "to promote inclusion", so that is what must happen. All 41 teaching and support staff were sent letters of dismissal by North Yorkshire county council last month.

Schools will have to take direct responsibility for home-educating pupils who are too ill to go to school. Meanwhile, children excluded for being violent and disruptive will be sent back to schools in Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale, which will get £700,000 between them to invest in "new teaching methods".

Teachers' unions say that too many children with serious behaviour problems are being sent to mainstream schools where teachers haven't the training or resources to prevent them from interrupting classes, let alone ensure that children with special needs are themselves getting a good education.

Baroness Warnock, who was responsible for devising the "statementing" system for children with special needs in the 1970s, recently switched sides in the inclusion debate. In a pamphlet published by the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, she said inclusiveness sprang from "hearts in the right place", but the consequent loss of specialised services for children with special needs was a "disastrous legacy".

Bomb-balls

"THE terrorists were engaged in a murderous act of psychogeography – arguably they were the maddest town planners around, they had succeeded in entirely fusing the physical layout of the city to its human content, while at the same time annihilating time, distance and possibility. Organised terror makes everyone a psychic victim – it's all about me. Their ideological motivation may have been radically different from that of Guy Debord and the original psychogeographers, yet like the Situationists these particular interpreters of Islam regarded the modern city as a contrived spectacle and sought ways in which to expose it as such. The detonator was their derive." – ***Will Self, Independent magazine.***

"Central London Property Boom as Commuters Fear Their Safety." – ***Press release on behalf of Spicerhaart estate agents.***

"We have received a number of calls from the media regarding the effect of the London bombings on Wiltshire and the community. Chief superintendent Julian Kirby has released the following statement in response to these inquiries: 'In spite of the recent attacks in London, Wiltshire and Swindon continue to be very safe places to live'." – ***Press release from Wiltshire police.***

"We offer our deepest condolences for the families that were affected during the tragic London bombings. Our sympathies and thoughts are with you all. On a positive note it has been exciting times at SinusWars LLC as we have employed two new staff and developed new sinus remedies..." – ***Email circular from SinusWars.com.***

MAN IN THE EYE

CHAI PATEL

CHAI PATEL, Labour's favourite generous health guru, is on the up again, buoyed by a £45m personal profit he has just made on the £875m sale of the Priory "rehab for the rich" Group, not to mention an interview of pure *arslikhan* in last week's *Guardian*.

Under the headline "The Caring Tycoon", the former NHS doctor was described as a "suave and charming interviewee", motivated not by money but a desire to restore "hope" to the NHS through private finance. (His outfit makes about £60m a year in taxpayers' money from people who would previously have been NHS patients.)

This rose-tinted review of Patel's career failed to mention the ethics of government appointing a donor as an adviser who stands to benefit hugely if his advice is followed; and it wasn't until the end of the piece that the tricky issue of Lynde House was raised.

As *Eye* readers are aware, Lynde House in Twickenham, south-west London, was run by what was then Patel's Westminster Health Care at a time when frail elderly patients were left for hours sitting in their own waste, suffered preventable falls and "unexplained bruising" and were left unmoved for so long they developed bed sores.

The General Medical Council was recently forced to abandon a disciplinary hearing against Patel after a high court judge decided the neglect charges levelled at him were a dog's dinner and there was insufficient evidence.

Patel told the *Guardian* he believed he had been "targeted because a lot of people on the GMC believed that the private sector should not be involved in these services... But there were eight layers of professionals between the patients and me," he complained.

That doesn't mean Patel was ignorant of the allegations nor powerless to do anything about them. Indeed, for a prolonged period Westminster Health Care and Patel appeared simply to be in denial about them.

When the *Eye* first started highlighting the plight of Lynde House residents in 2002, Westminster's then spokesman, Jonathan Street, denied the allegations and said the home had "always been of high quality and subject to very few complaints. This is borne out by the independent inspection reports".

Really? As a result of the GMC hearing, it has actually emerged that in 2001, a year before Street's blustering to the *Eye*, Westminster Health Care had commissioned a report by an independent consultant, Suzanne Mowat, which was highly damning. It highlighted complaints from families and staff about patients being left in soiled or wet beds, about bells not being answered, of low morale, poor staffing and communication, a lack of adequate care plans and clinical supervision... and a failure to handle complaints. "The level of complaints provides evidence of the failure to manage Lynde House effectively," Mowat concluded.

This report, written at the beginning of 2001, and a similarly critical inspection report by Mary McLaren (*Eye* 1054) nearly two years later, were both ruled inadmissible in the GMC hearing because they were deemed "hearsay". And who commissioned the Mowat report? Westminster Health Care's then regional manager, Bhavna Jones – Chai Patel's sister. No doubt one of those "eight layers" protecting him from responsibility.

FIVE TV

Big Brother (C4)

FIVE summers ago, ten young men and women who were only marginally less famous then than they are now moved into a house in east London, and everyone predicted the end of civilisation as we know it.

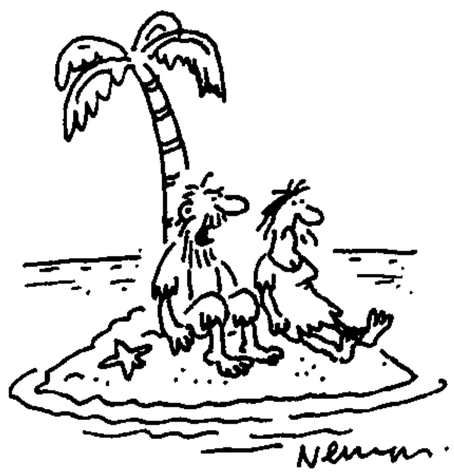
For the most part, however, the first *Big Brother* housemates just sat around and chatted. They asked questions about each other's lives. They worked their way through the two books each of them was allowed to bring into the house, before swapping and discussing what they thought of them. One of them occasionally strummed a guitar, and she wasn't even the one that was looking for a record contract.

This, according to then executive producer Ruth Wrigley, was what it was all about: "Bringing people together, forcing them to talk, and work together as a group." And they did. When it emerged that one of them was not only plotting to win the game show they had all forgotten they were playing but had also fabricated the tragic life story they had spent their first night in the house avidly discussing, their feelings of betrayal and wounded solidarity made for one of the most riveting hours of television ever broadcast, a piece of genuine drama beyond the reach of any scriptwriter.

Well, obviously that wouldn't do. The denouement didn't arrive until the fifth week, for goodness' sake. By the time series two's big story, the chaste romance between two contestants, even reached its apex of hand-holding the show was nearly over. It was reality TV all right, but the time scale was just too, well, realistic.

Fast-forward to this May, when the sixth crop of housemates entered the **Big Brother** house. The books are long gone (too much mental stimulation, not enough entertainment). The psychologists who used to provide a weekly commentary on body language and patterns of group behaviour are gone (they took up time that could have been filled with more footage of nihilistic shouting). But most disturbingly, the conversations are gone as well. Producers managed to select 16 housemates without the slightest interest in finding out anything at all about each other when they could simply shout about themselves instead.

They were utterly selfish, stupid and incapable of working together even on the rare occasions where they tried. Their only skill lay in starting arguments, about anything at all – their right to eat each other's food, to have sex with whoever they wanted in the presence of anyone they wanted, to get legless drunk or not be condemned for such "good craic" as putting scabs in each other's food, hurling faeces at one another or sticking wine bottles up their vaginas. Most of the time, they simply argued about the fact that they were arguing. All of which, as far as Channel 4 was concerned, made perfect telly.



"Dammit – we're missing 'Lost'"

Big Brother in its 2005 incarnation has gone far beyond Reality TV. It, and the dozens of other shows upon which Channel 4 quaintly continues to bestow that title, are something else, a genre in their own right. Confrontation TV, perhaps. Or ASBO TV. Since foul-mouthed mother-of-eight Lizzie Bardsley was rewarded with celebrity status for behaving in a manner that would be deemed unacceptable in an autistic five-year-old on *Wife Swap* two years ago, the commissioning process at Channel 4 (which last month gave us the *Nightmares Next Door,* a kind of *Wife Swap Cubed* which piled individually vile households on top of each other until they reached critical mass) seems to consist of "never mind the quality, listen to the shouting".

Station bosses virtuously assure anyone who will listen that this is simply a case of snobby television critics failing to recognise the reality of working class life; but to write off an entire section of society as either yobs or fishwives is as disingenuous as to assume that Derek Laud is a fair representation of all Conservatives, or his fellow housemate Craig the distilled essence of gays.

Of course, none of this matters to anyone save the contestants' families so long as the programmes deliver the ratings. But this year's *Big Brother* doesn't appear to have done even that. Despite the fact that this summer's series ran for longer, had more housemates than ever before, and featured the tabloids' holy grail of on-screen intercourse not once but twice, audiences have been significantly down. With none of the housemates actually capable of communicating with one other, let alone forming relationships, there was no chance of an overarching storyline to encourage repeated visits. You could see Craig throwing a hissy fit at Anthony on Day 21, and he was still at it on Day 74.

As the producers of *EastEnders* are belatedly discovering, week after week of shouting with no character development does not make for a loyal audience. What Channel 4 seems to have failed to ask itself is this: if these people's only selling point is that they are nightmare neighbours, why on earth would viewers want to keep on inviting them into our homes?

'Yoof'

JONATHAN AGNEW

THE BBC cricket correspondent Jonathan Agnew wishes to deny that he is "prone to going AWOL", as suggested in the last *Eye*.

We alleged that he had returned to his hotel for two hours during a rain interval on the Sunday of the Lord's Test, but Agnew informs us that he left the media centre for no more than 20 minutes. We also claimed that on the following day Radio Five Live was unable to book him for a post-match discussion because his phone was switched off all day; he tells us that his mobile phone may have been inaccessible between 2pm and 5pm, but that he checked his messages afterwards and found no calls from Five Live.

We apologise for the inaccuracies and are happy to set the record straight.

MEDIA NEWS

THE BBC was swift to apologise for featuring paedophile Jonathan King as a guest on Radio Five Live's Victoria Derbyshire show.

It pointed out that "it was not our intention to give him a platform to assert his innocence, but to challenge that assertion rigorously and to examine the possibility that his state of mind is typical of perpetrators of paedophile crimes".

This came as a surprise to King, who had been told by the senior producer who had booked him for the programme that "the subject of the interview would obviously be your court case, time in prison and attempts now to prove your innocence."

STUART MURPHY, controller of BBC Three, is clear about the benefit licence-payers reap from the £93m poured into the digital channel each year.

"We came up with *Little Britain*," he says.

But they didn't. *Little Britain* began life on BBC Radio 4.

GOING LIVE

"WE are informed that the Space Shuttle has landed safely," reported Huw Edwards on the BBC *Six O'Clock News* before going live to Clive Myrie at Cape Canaveral, Florida.

The shuttle had indeed landed safely… but it was nowhere to be seen, being three thousand miles away at Edwards air force base, southern California.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Which illness is named after its high temperature and red skin colouration?

Contestant: Yellow fever.

Richard Allinson show, Radio 2

Allinson: What international brand shares its name with the Greek goddess of victory?

Contestant *(after long deliberation)*: Erm, Kelloggs?

DUMB AUSTRALIA

Temptation, Channel 9

Presenter: Beginning with K, what was the first name of the German car maker whose last name was Benz?

Contestant: Bruce.

NEXT WEEK sees the launch of *Don't Get Me Started*, a series of TV polemics on Channel Five – including a forceful attack on "false grief" by Rosie Boycott, who whetted viewers' appetites by outlining her thesis in last Saturday's *Grauniad*.

"We live in an age of conspicuous public compassion," she wrote, "where we send flowers to dead celebrities and weep over murdered children we've never met."

Boycott and her producer are clearly hoping that no Five viewers read Patrick West's pamphlet, *Conspicuous Compassion*, published by the Civitas think tank last year. "We sport countless empathy ribbons," he wrote, "send flowers to recently deceased celebrities, weep in public over the deaths of murdered children…"

Back to Boycott: "When Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman were murdered in Soham in 2002, the number of people, or grief tourists, who descended on the town was overwhelming." Oddly enough, West's pamphlet also referred to the influx of coach parties wanting to see where the Soham girls were killed – a phenomenon he dubbed "grief tourism". He also complained of an increasing tendency for public figures to "jump on the grief bandwagon" – and, sure enough, Rosie Boycott's film denounces public figures who "vie to jump on the grief bandwagon".

Another of Boycott's gripes is that the traditional two-minute silence has been devalued by the inflation in ostentatious mourning. "A group calling themselves Hedge Rage allow a full two minutes for those who have been 'victimised' by their neighbour's leylandii," she notes incredulously. Or, as West put it in *Conspicuous Compassion*: "When a group called Hedgeline calls for a two-minute silence to remember all the 'victims' whose neighbours have grown towering hedges, we truly have reached the stage where this gesture has been emptied of meaning."

Only one question remains: will Boycott's programme be billed as a repeat?

FORMER *Today* programme editor Rod Liddle is to front a series for Sky One on infidelity, it was announced last week. Rod has some experience in such matters, having abandoned his bride on their honeymoon so he could return to see his young mistress.

He has not always been so keen on Sky, however. In a *Grauniad* column in August 2003, he took great exception to Sky executives who criticised the BBC in the wake of the death of Dr David Kelly. To expose their hypocrisy, he cited their own schedules: "Last night on Sky, by the way, you could watch re-runs of *Star Trek* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a profile of the brilliant and exciting Rachel Hunter (that woman who used to shag Rod Stewart) and more *Simpsons* re-runs than you could shake a stick at. On the sports channels there was 12 hours of tennis, two-and-a-half hours of greyhound racing and a division two cricket match. All for little more than £200 per year. But, hell, at least their journalistic standards aren't slipping."

No doubt Rod's new series will do much to elevate the station's quality of programming.

THE BBC's website *The People's War* turns out to be as accurate as the rest of the Beeb's "user-generated content".

It recently carried a photograph of British soldiers and sailors captioned: "Everyone knows a World War Two story." Perhaps: but the snap in question turned out to have been taken in the mid-1930s. In reality, very little content on the site can be authenticated and rumours abound of malicious and entirely fabricated war records undetected on the site.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Almost a third of parents support their children financially while they study compared to fewer than one in three in 2004." – *BBC News online.*

AD NAUSEAM

AS THE Tory party and its ad agency M&C Saatchi slug it out in the press over the huge fees being charged by a business belonging to the party's own former co-chairman, it's worth examining where such fees may have arisen.

In January there was a row between the Tories' election supremo Lynton Crosby and M'Lord Saatchi over how the party's election advertising campaign should be conducted. Crosby went with the prevailing wisdom in adland – that a blanket, nationwide poster campaign would be a waste of money. Instead, he said, the Tories should concentrate on key marginals via direct mail and telephone canvassing, much as the Labour party had said it would (*Eye* 1117).

Saatchi, on the other hand, favoured a much more extensive campaign, and as the man in charge of marketing, he pulled rank. The provocative poster campaign that emerged – "Are You Thinking What We're Thinking?" – was just one of several reasons the Tories lost the election.

As luck would have it a large poster campaign meant more money for M&C than a direct mail or telephone push, as the Tories are now coming to realise. Equally, however, it's a bit rich of the party to turn on its agency, given that just a month after the election the Tories said: "If an election could be won on advertising alone, the Conservative Party would now be enjoying a sizeable majority in the House of Commons."

LAST week, Bryan Magrath, marketing director at Dixons, declared, "35mm cameras were the first products we ever sold and film processing has been a part of our lives for several decades" .

He was announcing that the high-street chain would cease to stock non-digital cameras – a move eagerly picked up by every media outlet in the country as an excuse to run nostalgic pieces about the march of technology. "Last year, we pulled the plug on video recorders, but today's announcement is in many ways a more sentimental event."

Unhappy snappers need not yet panic, however. A quick search of the chain's website (dixons.co.uk) reveals that nine months after last autumn's announcement at least five different brands of video recorder are still available to buy from Dixons. But then "high street chain requests that journalists write lots of pieces about them for no particular reason" probably wouldn't have made such a catchy press release.

"YOU NEED a lot of protein after a tough game because it helps your muscles recover from the pressure you've put on them, so I tend to eat lots of things like Quorn and sushi, and then have massages and ice baths as well. My wife's really into Quorn, so she uses it for chillis and stuff," Michael Vaughan revealed in an interview about his eating habits with *Observer Food Monthly*.

How strange that both the England cricket captain and the magazine forgot to mention that one of his personal sponsors is, er, Quorn.

LUVVIES

My father was a tailor... I longed to be a tailor because I thought it a real craft. Instead I became a tailor of words. I'd take the material of language and I'd make a suit out of it – not an ordinary Montague Burton suit but a highly styled, radical, revolutionary suit.

STEVEN BERKOFF
***Observer* magazine**

Submitted by Arif Ellam.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

NAOMI ACCUSED OF PUNCHING SOMEONE ELSE !!!
NAOMI, I WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT YOUR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR!
ARE YOU A COUNSELLOR?
NO, A STRUGGLING MODEL. I CAN'T AFFORD COLLAGEN, ...CAN YOU GIVE ME A THICK LIP?

DOING THE ROUNDS

IN 1998 M.D. campaigned for older men to be offered ultrasound screening for abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA). Seven years later, the UK National Screening Committee (NSC) is still "considering its position" and thousands of pensioners have died from a ruptured aneurysm when they could have been saved by routine surgery.

Each year more than 4,500 men (and 1,800) women die from ruptured AAA, and the death rates for emergency surgery haven't shifted in a decade. Only three quarters of patients make it to hospital alive and of those who do, half die in or after surgery. It's one of the most dramatic and traumatic of surgical emergencies and the emotional and financial costs are substantial (blood products, medical and nursing staff, long stays on intensive care, rehabilitation etc).

In contrast, a multi-centre randomised controlled trial has shown a 42 percent reduction of deaths from AAA by screening men over 65. Those with aneurysms over a certain size were offered elective surgery which had a mortality of just 3 percent at 30 days. Had they been left alone, the chances of spontaneous rupture range from 9 percent to 33 percent each year, depending on the size of the aneurysm.

At four years, the cost per quality adjusted life year gained by surgery was £28,000, falling to £8,000 at 10 years, which compares very favourably with existing screening programmes. So what does the NSC think of this? Its programme director, Dr Muir Gray, says: "The cost benefit analysis in the trial is of very high quality but abdominal aortic aneurysm screening will be delivered effectively and safely only if sufficient resources are made available at local level."

Clearly the accuracy of the ultrasound and standard of elective surgery has to be high to justify screening, but a recent study of 2,400 men in Maidstone found that a specialist nurse could easily screen patients with a portable scanner. The attendance rate was high and, after surveillance or preventative surgery, the incidence of rupture fell by 33 percent making the case for screening "overwhelming".

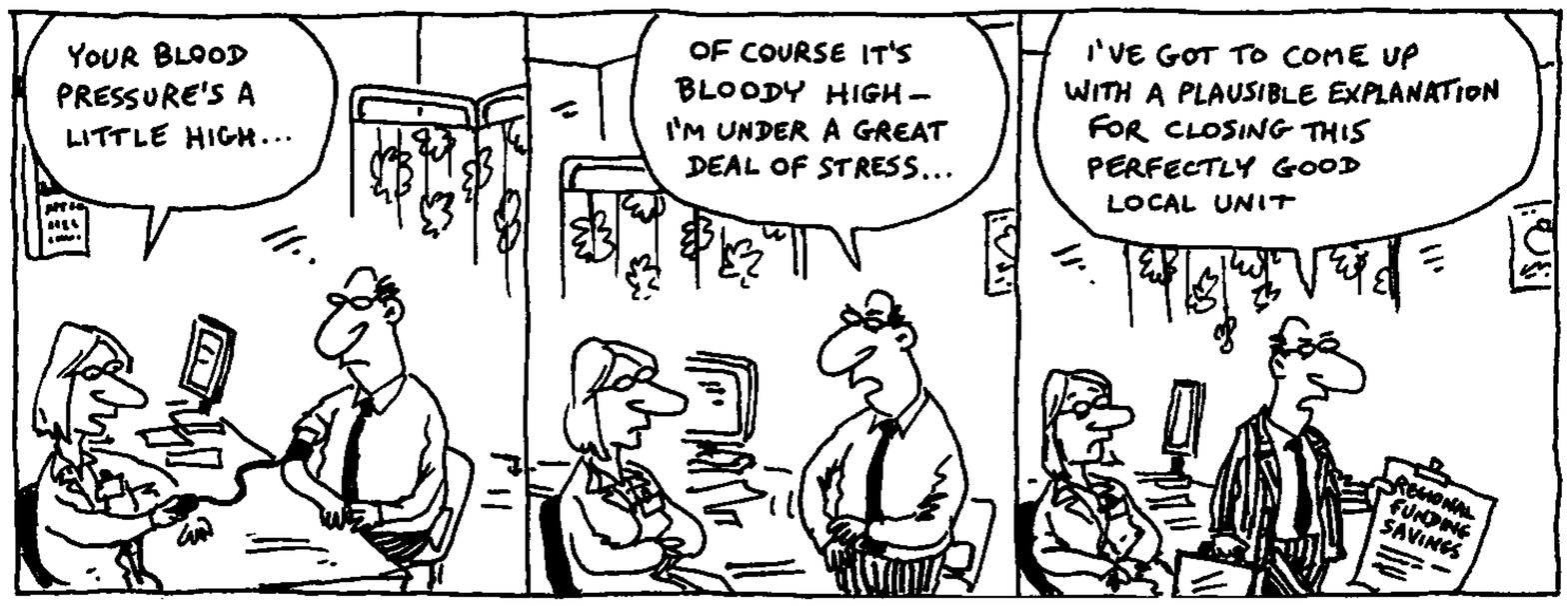
In Gloucester, where screening has been offered for 13 years and all but one of the GP practices support the scheme, the incidence of rupture has fallen progressively using only a single ultrasound scan for screening. If this were rolled out nationally, the cost could be less than £50m per year, and ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysm could become a rarity. Surgeons could also be properly trained to perform the elective surgery, in contrast to the pot luck of emergency surgery in the middle of the night. Indeed, as surgeons' hours have reduced under European law and they have far less experience of emergency surgery, screening with elective surgery seems the only safe option.

So why hasn't it happened? Sceptics point out the risks of a screening programme where the treatment (major surgery) is not without its own dangers and, as with other screening programmes, those most at risk (smokers) may not come forward. But equally men over pensionable age are not a political priority and even if we could offer them 10 years or more of good quality life, there is no strong lobby for it. In the meantime, BUPA will screen you for £200.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY


YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE'S A LITTLE HIGH...
OF COURSE IT'S BLOODY HIGH – I'M UNDER A GREAT DEAL OF STRESS...
I'VE GOT TO COME UP WITH A PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR CLOSING THIS PERFECTLY GOOD LOCAL UNIT
REGIONAL FUNDING SAVINGS

SIGNAL FAILURES
Going for a spin

AS THE government's programme of slashing train services gathers pace, "new" Labour spin makes one cut sound like an improvement.

Walsall-Wolverhampton trains, launched in 1998, are to be replaced in March by a "high quality express coach service in the short term to deliver faster end-to-end journey times".

Dictionaries define "express" as "operating at high speed". But the AA's route planner says the Walsall-Wolverhampton road journey (past several roundabouts, traffic lights and an M6 interchange) averages just 34mph in off-peak driving conditions, when the journey ostensibly takes 13 minutes. In peak congestion the coach will take much longer. The train isn't described by officials as "express" or "high quality" although it takes, er, 13 minutes (peak and off-peak).

The "express coach" won't depart from platforms but from outside the stations, making the service less attractive for passengers using connecting trains. Presumably the government will commission a new design of coach that matches the train's ease of access for passengers with wheelchairs, pushchairs and heavy luggage. Or perhaps the idea is to deter passengers altogether to facilitate closure? People who still refused to go by car could use trains – spending an hour going the long way round, changing in Birmingham and paying twice as much for the privilege.

Labour won't even consider developing the train service, as originally planned by Centro, the West Midlands' transport executive. Centro hasn't promoted the trains to locals because of "appalling reliability" from Central Trains (a private franchise bankrolled by the government). Centro also deferred two new stations near Walsall, having bought the necessary land for £500,000. Even so, the service carried 16 percent more passengers in 2004 than in 2003.

The decision to axe the service, contrary to the wishes of locally accountable Centro, shows why Labour recently grabbed rail powers from the regional transport executives (*Eye* 1129). But the closure announcement also shows how the government will, wherever possible, devolve the blame for rail cuts: "Centro and/or other stakeholders may wish to consider additional funding to continue the rail service after March 2006." So if Centro doesn't cough up, it's Centro's fault the trains are vanishing.

THE COMMUTERS
WOW! THIS IS FANTASTIC!
WE'VE FINALLY FOUND A LINE THAT'S CHEAP, RELIABLE AND QUICK!
...WISH THEY RAN ONE OF THESE INTO VICTORIA
DISUSED RAILWAY
SUSTRANS

THE wrong type of monsoon has become the rail industry's latest excuse for poor service. So many jobs have been switched to Indian call centres that when the subcontinent suffered exceptionally heavy rainfall last month, customers in balmy Britain were informed: "Due to severe weather conditions and the subsequent evacuation of our main call centre, we are currently experiencing difficulties in handling the usual level of calls."

The information that the call centre was in India was withheld, presumably for the same reason workers in Indian call centres have fake English forenames.

LABOUR is glossing over the real reasons it won't achieve its aim of 80 percent more freight on rail.

Last month transport secretary Alistair Darling said that figure, published in the 10-year transport plan of 2000, was "interpreted by many as a target, though we had always made it clear that actual growth would depend on a number of factors – in particular, the success of rail-freight operators in winning business in highly competitive markets". That implies the target is unachievable because of economics beyond government control; but since 2000 Labour has done almost everything in its power to stop its 80 percent target being met.

The principle of switching freight from road to rail was supported by 81 percent of the public questioned in a 2002 poll, but not by the mighty road lobby. So the government scrapped long-standing rail-freight grants, introduced even heavier lorries to give hauliers better economies of scale, and diluted the working-time directive for lorry drivers. Planned fuel-duty increases for road vehicles have been deferred repeatedly since the last rise in 2003, but duty has increased on the red-dyed diesel used for trains. Infrastructure upgrades for more and bigger freight trains have been dropped. One such scheme, on the Southampton-Midlands route, would enable trains to carry larger containers, which now go on the parallel lorry-saturated A34 road. Labour won't fund that £30m scheme, although it puts at £42m the cost of the 82 fatal or serious road accidents on the A34 (between the M3 and M40) in 2002-4.

'Dr B Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

BLIND FAITH

SO FAREWELL, then, Lambeth chief executive Faith Boardman, who is leaving the London borough having secured herself a deal which over the next 10 years will be worth more than £1m. The generous golden goodbye will, it is hoped, offset somewhat Boardman's disappointment at failing her annual appraisal last month.

Boardman does not officially leave Lambeth until December but has been granted "extended leave" for the next five months. Not only will her pension receive a steady top-up over the next few months; she will also continue to draw her £180,000 annual salary, plus a special "performance" related bonus, while not actually doing any performing or *work*. When her "final" day arrives in December, Boardman, 55, will receive a lump sum of £220,000. She will then get an annual pension of £74,000 for the rest of her life.

The deal was signed-off by the district auditor following an appraisal of Boardman's performance by Huw Jones-Owen, an external consultant. Embarrassingly for Boardman, details of both the appraisal and the payoff leaked the day after her "departure".

As part of the appraisal Owen-Jones asked the leaders of the council's three political parties to rate her performance on a range of issues. The consensus emerged that Boardman was not up to scratch when it came to dealing with "cultural change" within Lambeth, communicating with councillors and senior managers or prioritising her workload and inspiring others. When asked to rate her own performance in the same areas, Boardman felt she was the best thing since sliced bread.

When Owen-Jones sat Boardman down and told her how her appraisal had gone, she burst into tears before grabbing her jacket and fleeing home to bury her head in a pillow. The following day, nerves restored, she arrived for work and told Peter Truesdale and John Whelan, respectively Lib-Dem leader and Tory deputy leader of Lambeth, that she had had enough and wanted to negotiate a leaving package. The only demand that they did not accede to was Boardman's claim that she should also be given a one-off payment of £100,000… for "hurt feelings".

CURSE OF MONKS

ANOTHER embarrassing reversal for the Standards Board for England (SBE), the inconsistent ethics watchdog for councillors.

Previous *Eyes* have reported how the SBE twice refused to take action against David Scott, a Tory councillor on East Northamptonshire district council (ENDC). Scott, a wealthy businessman, represents Dryden ward, home to publican Geoff Monks who suffered a series of vindictive food safety prosecutions by ENDC which resulted in record fines, a prison sentence and the loss of his business (*Eyes passim*). Scott's response to Monks's difficulties was not to try to assist or defend him but to offer to buy his pub at a knock-down price "now that the figures are so down".

Scott admitted offering to buy the pub; but the SBE concluded it wasn't a problem. Last week, in the high court, however, Mr Justice Crane gave permission for a full judicial review of the SBE's decisions. The question, said the judge, was whether the man in the street might have formed an impression that Cllr Scott had broken the local government code of conduct and brought his office into disrepute by offering to purchase the pub. The evidence, therefore, deserved to be tested properly.

PS: Thirty guests at a charity reception at Cllr Scott's riverside garden at Islip, near Wellingborough, fell into the river Nene on 31 July when a boathouse floor gave way during a rush for the buffet. "A timber supporting the platform became dislodged when everyone approached the buffet," Cllr Scott told the local paper. "That apart I believe everyone had a good time." Christina Turner, the mayoress of Grantham, said: "It was such a shame. It was an idyllic situation, with ladies in big hats and gentlemen in striped blazers."

AWORTHY successor has emerged in Bath for Jan Siegieda, the city's former tourism chief, who was sacked last year after maintaining that the shambles of the city's £26m bath Spa project – four years late with 10 opening dates missed – was good news for the city. "I think it is great that the Spa is shut," he told the *Bath Chronicle*. "The longer it stays shut the better. The fact that it is shut is making people more interested and more and more people are finding out about it. In a strange sort of way, it is working in our favour" (*Eye* 1099).

Now Andrew Furse, a Lib-Dem member of Bath and North-east Somerset council, has come up with a similarly counter-intuitive piece of brilliance. Councils could save lives, and taxpayers' money, he declares, by not mending holes in the roads: "When people are confronted by less well-maintained road surfaces with potholes, they tend to drive slower. They are worried about doing damage to their car and, as such, are far more careful." Trust a Lib-Dem to solve a problem with a bracing dose of commonsense!

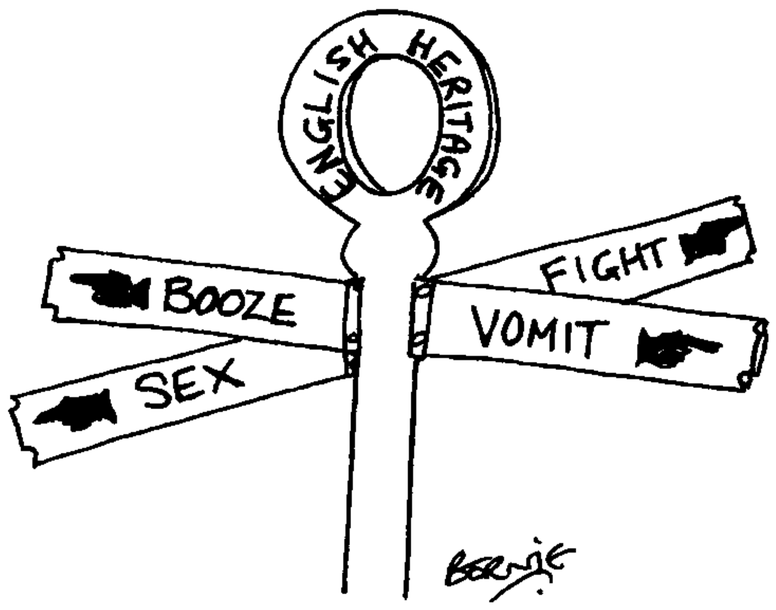
HERMAN'S HERMITS

SOUTHWARK council leader Cllr Nick Stanton and chief executive Bob Coomber have clung desperately to the tenuous fact that Lord Herman Ouseley's recent report (*Eyes passim*) did not explicitly accuse the council of racism or institutional racism in its final uncensored version.

However, that last plank of support is about to go under. Although Ouseley made no comment one way or the other on council guilt, he now says the fact that many complainants "were found by me during the review to have been treated unreasonably, unfairly, differentially and detrimentally adds up to inferred discriminatory treatment". The victims were listed in an annexe, which has been severely censored by the council.

This legally-worded bombshell could have a major impact on the £9.1m claim from Imperial Gardens, the black nightclub closed following alleged misfeasance by council employees. Former planning manager Mark Dennett, arrested in April, is due to report to Inspector Knacker again later this month.

In the circumstances the council's liability insurers, American International Group, may feel unable to pay all of the claim. That, in turn, could lead to higher bills for Southwark council-taxpayers. Or even surcharges for officers and Lib-Dem councillors – a prospect which is causing more than a few sleepless nights.



MUSIC & MUSICIANS

WHEN the *gloriosi* of the British arts world get poached by America, they usually depart in triumph, basking in the sense that have made it big. But not always. Two pending departures have attracted less enthusiastic noises off.

One is that of Marin Alsop, the feisty female conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra who has been announced as the next music director of the Baltimore Symphony: a well-deserved and appropriate appointment for someone who is, after all, American-born, a former protégé of Leonard Bernstein and whose international reputation has been built largely on recordings of American music.

Everybody should be happy. But they're not. The Baltimore musicians don't like her and don't want her. According to the chairwoman of the players' committee, they take the view that the search for a music director should continue. As Alsop hasn't as yet announced her resignation from Bournemouth, she'd be wise to think twice before burning her boats.

The other departing soul is Anthony Freud, general-director of Welsh National Opera but soon to take on the same, but more lucrative role, at Houston Grand Opera in Texas. Press releases have been flooding out of Wales and Houston commending his past achievements and future promise.

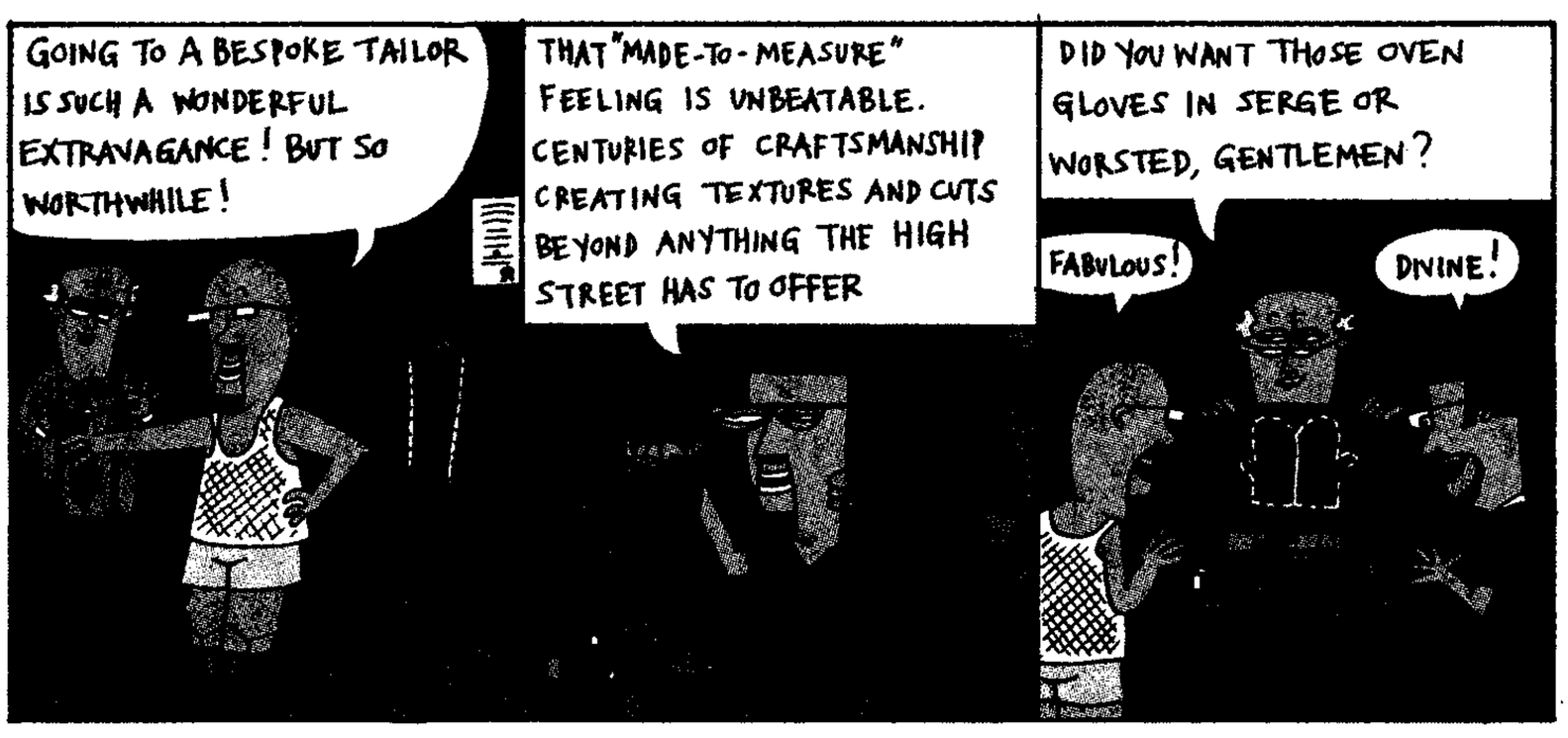
But behind the rhetoric is the fact that these achievements haven't been so obvious to those who've worked for him in recent years. Who was it who, not long ago, was so besotted with the hidden talents of a young and desperately inexperienced Russian conductor called Tugan Sokhiev that he made him WNO's music director against all reasonable advice? Anthony Freud. Who was it who then allowed Sokhiev to take on repertory he so badly couldn't handle it fell apart? Anthony Freud. Who was it whose misjudgements then led to an orchestral revolt and the hasty resignation of Sokhiev, leaving WNO with no conductor as it faced the most critical moment of its modern history, the move into the Wales Millenium Centre? You guessed.

These blunders haven't featured prominently in the Texan/Welsh encomia. But the music staff at WNO haven't forgotten what Freud put them through. Their counterparts in Houston know it too. And the joy with which they wait for his arrival isn't uncontained.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

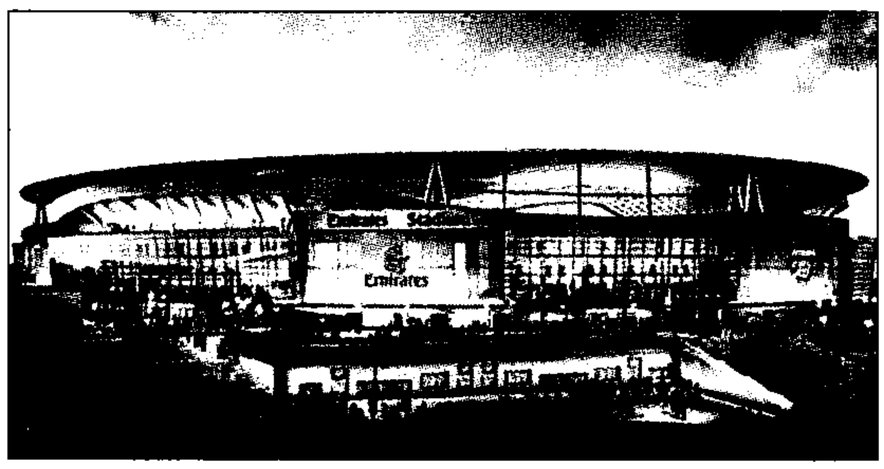

GOING TO A BESPOKE TAILOR IS SUCH A WONDERFUL EXTRAVAGANCE! BUT SO WORTHWHILE!
THAT "MADE-TO-MEASURE" FEELING IS UNBEATABLE. CENTURIES OF CRAFTSMANSHIP CREATING TEXTURES AND CUTS BEYOND ANYTHING THE HIGH STREET HAS TO OFFER
DID YOU WANT THOSE OVEN GLOVES IN SERGE OR WORSTED, GENTLEMEN?
FABULOUS!
DIVINE!

NOOKS and CORNERS

JUST what a catastrophe the 2012 games will be for London and Britain will emerge soon enough, when all available funds are redirected from the arts to funding the developments required by the Olympics.

The government will ride roughshod over local interests and the normal planning system, as developers clamour to exploit all the lucrative opportunities. If sport really were the issue, it would be more useful if the government reversed the wicked practice of selling off playing fields and made sure every local swimming pool was well maintained rather than building a couple of huge new stadia in the Lea Valley.

The shabby story of the Arsenal football ground gives a hint of what lies in store. As recounted in *Eye* 1046, Arsenal is leaving its 38,000 capacity stadium in Highbury and building a new 60,000-seater arena next to the main railway line out of King's Cross. Named the Emirates Stadium as a tribute to the tolerant, democracy-loving Islamic states on the Persian Gulf, this is now nearing completion. But next to nothing has been done to improve the transport systems to cope with the



huge crowds anticipated: Arsenal FC has been much more concerned to maximise profitability of the enabling development on adjacent land, which has greatly increased.

Outline planning permission was granted by Islington council for 557 housing units – mostly flats – in 2002. Now a new so-called "revised" application has been submitted for 711 homes. Of these, a mere 49 are to be "affordable" housing (for purchase) and only six, for the disabled, are to be (rentable) social housing. The proportion of social housing in the 2002 proposal was already below that specified in both Islington's development plan and the mayor of London's plan, so what is now proposed is almost an insult.

Yet Islington nodded the new plans through in June, banning one ward councillor from the meeting as "she has a personal interest by living close to the site." Islington council has also done well out of what is in essence a big money-making exercise by selling the site of its old waste disposal plant to Arsenal for the new stadium.

Then there is the question of what happens to Highbury stadium, for while the East Stand (which is listed) and the West Stand are staying and being converted into flats, the North and South Stands are coming down. Arsenal FC was originally furious when the East Stand was listed, as that frustrated its plan to redevelop the stadium, but now it is pleased. Why? Because the indirect consequence is that the North and South Stands are to be replaced by blocks equally high so as to maintain the character of the stadium rather than have low-rise developments on the old football ground similar in scale to the surrounding modest terraced housing and to what was swept away when Arsenal arrived from Woolwich in 1913. Local residents will now be overshadowed by a huge private residential fortress – gated like a development in Docklands. And all for the sake of football.

TALKING of modest terraced housing, deputy prime minister John Prescott continues to press for the destruction of acres and acres of it in the north under his pet Pathfinder scheme.

One of the many victims of his crazed, 1960s utopianism is poor old Middlesbrough, a city which has already suffered enough from crude redevelopment and where, in Gresham Ward alone, 1,500 houses in 37 streets are to be bulldozed. Most of these are perfectly sound and many have been modernised and improved by their owners. Petitions against the plans have been organised by local residents, one signed by 1,250 people. No matter: the OPDM has decreed that Middlesbrough, like other cities and towns, will only benefit from government funding if it pursues "radical" and "sustainable" redevelopment schemes.

Prescott's willing accessory is the independent mayor of Middlesbrough, the controversial former "Robocop" of the Cleveland police, Ray Mallon. Mr Mallon has a column in* The Northern Echo, *and on 22 July he explained that the demolitions are justified because Gresham, despite being a socially stable mixed community, is "an area of terraced houses, some over 100 years old" and so did not have garages or en-suite bathrooms and other essentials.

This sentiment echoed one of Mrs Thatcher's sillier remarks, when she complained it was a scandal that half of our nation's children still went to school in Victorian buildings, not reflecting that those children may have been the lucky ones.

In his column a week later, the mayor then enthused about his first ever visit to Rome, where "you can stroll through parks littered with 2000-year-old architecture." No bad thing, it would seem, as "Rome is wonderful." So it is fine for Italians to retain buildings aged by millennia but wrong for the benighted people of Middlesbrough to live in houses over whose roofs a mere century has passed. Some contradiction here, surely?

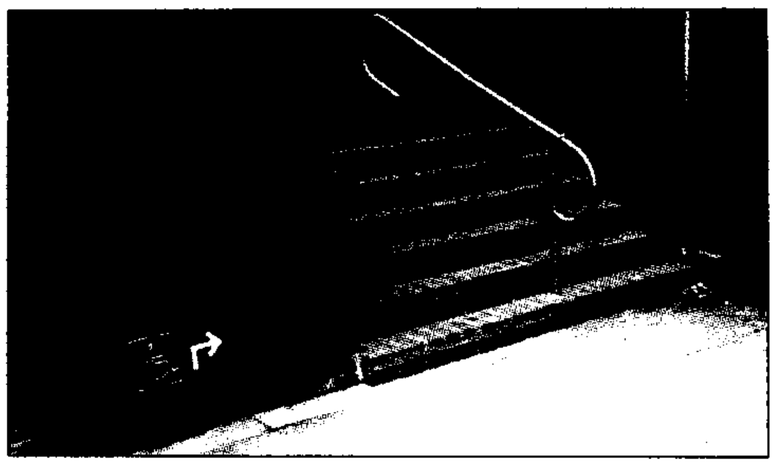
'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

At long last!
CONCEPTUAL ARTIST TO CARTWHEEL FROM BRIGHTON TO LONDON
PROTEST AGAINST PEOPLE TAKING STONES FROM BEACH
A serious story, after all that Silly Season rubbish!

I-SPY *Civic Centre, Chelmsford*



Submitted by Asher Heighlam. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

Down on the Farm

NO COUNTY apart from Cumbria was hit harder by the 2001 foot-and-mouth disaster than Devon.

In August that year, local farmers were still in shock as they met at the Devon county show, wondering whether their industry could ever recover. Among those trying to see a way forward was Kenneth Campbell, whose background in the hospitality industry had given him an idea for encouraging Devon's restaurants, pubs and hotels to use local products. When he met Jonathan Smye, an official of Devon county council's Devon Food Links unit, he learned that the council might be interested in his "Devonshire Flavour" project. Smye told him the council would support an application to Defra for funding, so long as Campbell produced a business plan.

By the end of September, he and Smye were setting up presentations to introduce the idea to farmers and catering businesses. Campbell submitted his application to Defra, and set about registering Devonshire Flavour as a company and trade name. All seemed set fair.

Now, however, the story became murky. In January 2002, Smye told Campbell that a £50,000 grant had been given to Devonshire Flavour, not by Defra but by the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA). This came as a shock to Campbell. He knew nothing about any application to the SWRDA. Only gradually did he discover that another council official, Ian Hutchcroft had used Campbell's business plan and the name Devonshire Flavour to make a totally separate application for funding. Furthermore, the fact that the SWRDA had given £50,000 to Devonshire Flavour ruled out any chance of Campbell getting his grant from Defra.

The story now became murkier still. When the council realised Campbell had registered Devonshire Flavour as a trade name, it quickly changed the name of its own project to "Eating Out, Eating Local". Campbell found he had been frozen out altogether, even though the £50,000 had been awarded to Devonshire Flavour, based on his business plan. Thus began a Kafkaesque correspondence with the council and the SWRDA which was to last another three years.

What made this even more mysterious was the way the SWRDA seemed to have become complicit in this double-dealing. Dr Sue Brownlow, its head of "Devon Operations", repeatedly insisted that the £50,000 had been awarded to the council's "Eating Out, Eating Local" project, even though the document which might prove this had somehow got lost. Only in February 2005 did an application under the freedom of information act finally unearth the allegedly "lost" document. This showed that both the council officials and the SWRDA had consistently been lying. The £50,000 had indeed been awarded to Devonshire Flavour, and for the project proposed by Mr Campbell.

As for what became of the £50,000 of taxpayers' money, an internet search reveals that the last recorded reference to Eating Out, Eating Local on the council website was in 2003. Apart from paying to keep a few officials busy, its contribution to helping Devon's farming community recover from foot and mouth appears to have been non-existent.

'Muckspreader'

Letters

Private Eye

Performing Right and wrong

Sir,

Lunchtime O'Boulez has perhaps finally had a Bordeaux too many (Eye 1138).

It's true, PRS did distribute more money than ever to its members in 2004 and a record £1.7m was paid to its classical members for the live performance of their works.

We can't give more to classical composers than they have earned (as was once the case) since we are not here to subsidise, but to make sure members get their rightfully earned royalties as quickly and accurately as possible.

The PRS Foundation is an independent charity and the largest funder of new music in the UK. It was set up by PRS five years ago to support all genres of music, yet still supports classical projects to the tune of £½ million a year.

Neither the Foundation nor its New Music Award are paid for by "creaming off" the royalties of PRS members. They are paid for, transparently, from interest accrued during the royalty distribution process.

And perhaps had the nature of classical entries for the New Music Award been more "refreshingly approachable and adventurous" then more than one classical composer (Terry Mann) might have made the final shortlist of three.

I'm sure the New Music Award judges will be looking forward to some exciting and exhilarating entries from the classical world for the next outing of the New Music Award.

ELLIS RICH,

Chairman, Performing Right Society.

Discord

Sir,

Re the PRS (1138). We run a classical music festival here in rural Kent, putting on eight string quartet and instrumental recital concerts each summer, in a building with 80 seats. We receive no grant, and run at a small loss, made up by private donations. We have to pay the PRS about £400, which is 5 percent of our ticket sales, because five out of the 29 pieces being played this summer are by composers who died in the last 70 years.

And the money goes to pop stars!

PETER KNAPTON,

Via email.

Reverse charges

Sir,

You published a letter in issue 1138 in which a reader criticised the BBC for using 0845 and 0870 prefixed telephone "hotlines" following the terrorist attacks of 7 July 2005. Your readers should be aware that 0845 numbers (about 3p/minute – ie local rate) and 0870 numbers (about 7p/minute – ie national rate) are not the same as 0898 numbers (typically £1+/minute). The letter suggested that the BBC was trying to make scandalous profits from the disaster. Quite unfair.

Yours,
JAMES DIXON,

Reading.

Remote from reality?

Sir,

Is it just me that thinks Remote Controller is going to the dogs? First his pisspoor piece on women's football (his latest in a long line of pisspoor football articles). Now this attack on Curtis's The Power of Nightmares.

Remote Controller supposes that the main thrust of the documentary was the government's invention of al Qaeda, that Curtis somehow claimed al Qaeda were fictitious. This simply isn't true, the documentary spends a great deal of time examining the Wahhabist movement, indeed the primary point he made was how similar the Neo-Cons and Wahhabists were. The point he did make was that the west overstated how organised and omni-present al Qaeda were, that "al Qaeda" is an almost meaningless term, used by western media as a lazy shorthand for the many and disparate groups who feel aggrieved at the west's foreign policy in the Middle East. He also attacked nonsense like Iraq being linked to al Qaeda. These are all valid points and are in no way invalidated by the events of 7 July.

"The flaw in this reasoning was that... Al Qaeda bombs had been spotted in New York, Bali, Madrid and elsewhere." Piffle, if anything these events confirm his assertion – all of the attacks were carried out by small, separate and highly fragmented organisations.

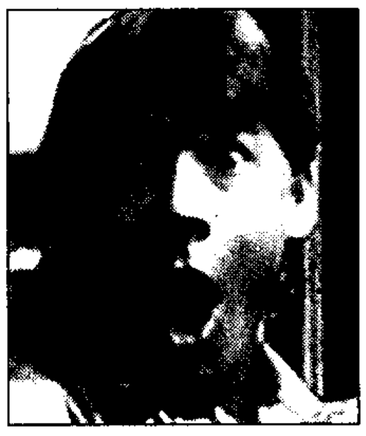
Disappointing that this simplistic and one-dimensional argument would be allowed space in an organ as esteemed and venerable as your own. Almost (but not quite) as disappointing as every fortnight's Husband cartoon.

Kind regards,
ALLY BURNETT,

London W1.

Lookalike

Irwin



Warne

Sir,

Have you spotted the uncanny resemblance between Steve Irwin, crocodile hunter par excellence, and Shane Warne, the shy, retiring Australian bowler? Apparently they were both brought up by dingos, y'know.

KATIE TATTERSALL,

Leeds.

Talking rubbish

Sir,

Assuming that your Libyan correspondent was under the influence of the local khamr when he filed his report (Letter from Libya, Eye 1138) committing the sin of metathesis (Mukharabhat for Mukhabbirat) this may be a case of in vino veritas. While the second of these Arabic words, clearly intended, means "informers", the first comes from a root meaning "rubbish".

Regards,
ALASDAIR LIVINGSTONE,

Via email.

SOLUTIONS

"Element K Learning Solutions" – *lessons*

"CleanseSmart Gut Solutions" – *constipation pills*

"BWI Balloon Solutions" – *balloons*

"Initial Washroom Solutions" – *toilets*

"Addis Cleaning Solutions" – *mops*

"NFR Cooling Solutions" – *fridges*

All submitted by readers

Scenes You Seldom See

"Yes, this is Andrew Willis. Who? Do you? You sell double glazing? Great. Tell me more. I'm thinking about having some put in"

Tunnels vision

Sir,

Re: Williamson Tunnels.

While we are grateful for the publicity for our cause (Piloti, Eye 1138), you do seem to have been more than a little unfair to Liverpool city council. Not only have they given support to the Williamson Tunnels Heritage Centre, they are also involved in negotiations concerning The Friends of Williamson's Tunnels and two other sites, and, if these are successful, they will become our landlords.

We would like to see Liverpool city council become involved in the acquisition of those parts of the old lord mayor's stable yard which are threatened by a change of ownership and commercial development of a valuable heritage site.

Any of your readers who would like to read the full story should visit www.williamsontunnels.com

Yours faithfully,
FRANK HODGES,

Trustee, Friends of Williamson's Tunnels.

Voice of youth

Sir,

In his capacity as a loyal "Beano" reader and devoted Menace, my 10-year-old son has instructed me to point out the grave error in the "Seven Pages of Man" cartoon on page 5 of your last issue (1138).

Dennis the Menace has featured regularly in the "Beano" since 1951. To the best of our knowledge he has never appeared in that inferior publication, the "Dandy". We hope you will check your facts more carefully in future.

Yours,
BRENDA SELWYN,

Bath.

Coleman balls

Sir,

For once I find myself in agreement with Vernon Coleman in his statement (Advert, Eye 1138) that "The London bombings were a direct result of our helping America invade Iraq. Blair's reckless loyalty to the USA has endangered British citizens". Does this mean that, for Londoners at least, the main threat to life is no longer that, as claimed in Coleman's previous adverts, posed by such as myself and my medical colleagues?

Yours hopefully,
DR BOB HEYS,

Halifax.

Trials and jubilation

Sir,

As a retired GP acquainted with mothers whose normal children have regressed into autism after MMR, I am glad the Eye regularly exposes the flaws in the retrospective studies on which the case for MMR safety is built. Only a large prospective trial, with children randomised **before** *vaccination to either MMR or spaced single dose jabs, will resolve this issue. Retrospective studies lack statistical validity. Autism has risen tenfold since MMR came in, so a definitive trial is needed.*

Action on population data is also needed for breast cancer. This afflicts 1 in 10 British women, but only 1 in 10,000 in China – where it is called "the rich woman's disease". Traditional Chinese people do not drink milk after infancy, and cows' milk does contain Insulin Growth Factor-1 which is known to make cells divide rapidly, and often Lindane, a pesticide whose banning in Israel was followed by a fall in breast cancer. Soya can replace milk and osteoporosis – loss of the protein in bone to which calcium adheres – can be put off by exercising and not smoking.

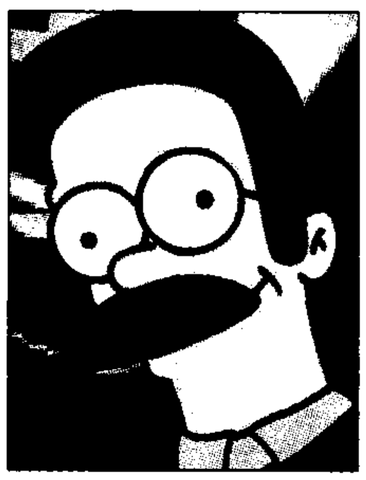
Very best wishes,

Yours sincerely,
PETER SMITH,

Halifax.

Lookalike

Flanders



Bolton

Sir,

Now Ned Flanders is moving to the UN in New York, will he ever get his mower back from Homer?

CHRIS WEBSTER,

Abergavenny.

Wrong man

Sir,

I would have described Alan Howarth as urbane and genial, and would certainly be surprised if he had presided over the PLP's resource office for three decades, when he spent much of that time on the Tory benches. Alan Haworth, on the other hand, fits your description rather better.

Regards,
CHRIS CARR,

London.

Tanks for the memory

Sir,

I'm so bored by this correspondence I can hardly speak let alone write but here goes...

You were right all along. Don Jones may be an ex-BAOR tankie, but like most members of that doughty army that kept the torch of freedom burning in the West, he obviously only learned enough German during his time in the Fatherland to order bratties with mayonnaise and mustard – and perhaps Noch ein bier, bitte.

German tanks are named after big cats. So the largest WWII tank was a Tiger and the current one's a Leopard. Can you tell what a Panzer is yet? Panzer Tank isn't remotely tautological.

Yours faithfully,
GEOFFREY MATTHEWS (EX-PBI, BAOR),

Via email.

Copper-bottomed complaint

Sir,

Roy Clark may be a controversial choice to oversee the IPCC's investigation of the police shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes (Eye 1138), but your article does another former serving officer a gross disservice.

The implication of your article is clearly that John Cummins, a former Cambridgeshire officer, is an inappropriate person to manage the day-to-day running of the investigation. This can only be for two reasons: that Mr Cummins is inappropriate because he is personally compromised or he is inappropriate because he is a former police officer. Since you offer no evidence of the former, it must, therefore, be the latter.

In order to oversee a police investigation, particularly one as high-profile as this, one must have more than a passing knowledge of how a police investigation is properly run and whether procedures and protocols have been correctly followed. Therefore qualified investigators come from a fairly limited background and include a large proportion of former serving officers. The nasty insinuation of your article is that all coppers are too bent to be trusted with such a task, regardless of an individual's personal qualities, track record or qualification for the role – a position that does you no credit.

Yours sincerely,
MIKE HOFFMAN,

London WC2.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"The idea of 24-hour drinking is not 24-hour drinking."
DAVID BLUNKETT, BBC Radio 2
(Nick Andrews)

"This is the time when your team manager is worth more than salt."
COLIN JACKSON, BBC2
(Bernard Greatorex)

"He's got a good brain on his shoulders."
PAUL DICKENSON, BBC
(James Butler)

"Disappointment would be way down my list of adjectives."
GORDON STRACHAN, Guardian website
(Richard Parkinson)

"Keepers normally go for the ball with two hands, and then when it looks like getting out of reach, the other one comes into play."
TONY GREIG, Channel 4
(Alan Sillitoe)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Should get out more

Sir,

While I agree with Ken Strong's view (1138) on the split infinitive, may I point out that there is really no such thing. The infinitive (ie, non-finite form) of the verb go is actually go. The form to go, which English speakers have conventionally called an infinitive, is a prepositional phrase headed by the preposition "to" that uniquely takes an infinitive complement. (We don't think that the French infinitive is à aller.)

The question now is, whether one can split a prepositional phrase. If we can say prone to obsequious flattery why shouldn't we be able to say prone to obsequiously flatter?

I just thought you might like to know.

ROGER MAYLOR,

Via email.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

No doubt you are already aware that that bastion of morals Piers Morgan has distinguished himself again. It seems that Kate Garraway's recent engagement to former Labour spin doctor Derek Draper prompted a "flushed and clumsy" Morgan, at a recent presentation dinner, to sidle up to the fragrant GMTV presenter and mutter: "Derek bloody Draper! If I'd known the bar was set so low, I'd have had a go myself."

Do you by any chance have examples in your files of other ex-editors making their feelings known to attractive women in similar circumstances?

Yours,
NEIL MCFARLANE,

London.

45-minute warning

Sir,

The National Theatre's ad in edition 1138 advertises "an evening with Private Eye", lasting... 45 minutes.

Shome mishtake, shurely?
RICHARD SIMMONDS,

Via email.

Letter from **Islamabad**
from Our Own Correspondent

OUR soldier president Pervez Musharraf has promised that he will rid Pakistan of Islamic terror in all its forms. But don't hold your breath.

For years Pakistan has been the nerve-centre of the *jehadi* mafia, closely connected with almost all major terrorist strikes since 9/11. It provides not only the foot soldiers, but also safe haven to the planners, including Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda cells. Washington and London should understand this well as it was they who helped create the problem.

All the main Islamic terrorist groups and their cells across Europe, Africa and Asia can be linked to the 1979-89 class of *Mujahideen* fighters nurtured by the CIA to evict the Soviets from Afghanistan. The so-called "Safari Club" was supported by donations from Saudi Arabia, while "advisers" from Britain's SAS and France's *SDECE* provided the *Mujahideen* training in guerrilla fighting, surveillance and communications. Israel provided weapons while states like Sudan and Algeria provided lots of angry young men.

"Busharraf", so named for his fealty to George W, says he's a lot stronger now than he was the last time he promised to get tough three years ago. Maybe: but is he strong enough to take on the very people on whom the survival of his regime depends – who also happen to be at the heart of the *jehadi* machine?

The key forces in Pakistan today are the military and the Inter Services Intelligence Directorate (ISID) and the six-party Muttahida Majlise-Amal (MMA) Islamist coalition. The army-ISID and MMA share a visceral hatred of the west and dream of a jehad to seize the "inverted crescent", an Islamic Caliphate from Afghanistan via Kashmir to Central Asia.

These are tendencies that first emerged after General Zia's coup in 1977 and accelerated after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. It was at this time that the extremist *Jamait-e-Islami* (JeI or Islamic Group, now an integral part of the MMA) took root within the army and the ISID. The JeI decrees that Islam is not only a way of life but a complete system of politics, economics and culture, incompatible with western secular democracy. Encouraged by the JeI, newly commissioned defence personnel consider themselves not only soldiers of the state, but also of Islam.

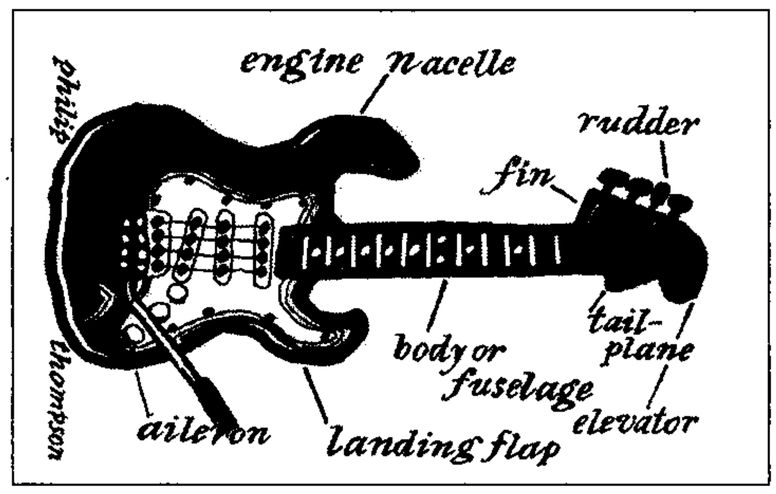
This process of Islamisation in turn led to the emergence of a parallel freelance armed force, comprising the military-trained, equipped and sponsored madrassa graduates who joined militant organizations. Over the years these groups have developed an existence independent of their mentors, complete with arms caches, communication networks and operational plans, all sustained by global financial empires nurtured on smuggling Afghani heroin. So Pakistan today has an army within an army, which is likely to prove impossible to demobilize. Indeed, there are signs that such groups are being encouraged, not dismantled. Afghanistan's Taliban, which first emerged from the madrassas to seize power with covert Pakistani support, is again resurgent, reinforced by fresh recruits from those same madrassas.

The MMA is already in power in North West Frontier Province. It recently passed the Hasba bill, which creates a parallel Islamic system of justice and propaganda, and a Saudi-style religious thought police. The bill, which awaits federal ratification, also makes it compulsory for people to leave their work places at prayer times for mosques.

How did the MMA, set up only in 2001, become so influential? To level the playing field, its members were the only parties allowed by the military to hold public rallies before the elections the following year. Several mainstream politicians were barred for lacking academic qualifications, while the general ruled flimsy degrees from madrassas as acceptable. It's said Musharraf believed a strong showing by the MMA could be used to wave a red flag at a nervous US and bolster American support for his presidency. But it might be best to be careful what you wish for.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**



●"Hello there..."

"I'm Emil Berglund, project leader for the World Championship in Guitar Throwing, which is taking place at the Balsta Festival in the Eskilstuna area this weekend."

"What is the world record?"

"It stands at 23.4 metres. That may not seem far, but an electric guitar is really heavy."

"But it isn't just the distance that counts, is it?"

"No, the jury award marks for finesse and originality in the throwing technique as well."

"Is there a difference between throwing an electric and an acoustic guitar?"

"Yes, an acoustic guitar has completely different aerodynamics. We have specialised in electric guitars at this competition, but I'm going to see whether we can have two classes next year."

"Which is better for throwing – a Fender or a Hagstrom?"

"The world record is held by a Fender, and that make has been doing well this year. We're handing out 25 Fenders to participants and hope that will suffice. But there are some throwers who are more professional, and they're allowed to bring their own equipment." (Gothenburg Metro, 20/5/05. Spotter: Sally Aisbitt)

– ● –

●"Even by San Francisco's standards, this event is unusual," Carol Queen told reporters in the city's Center for Sex and Culture, "but we want to encourage people to have a good time with themselves. It's a serious effort to counter centuries of censure, to make this activity more fun and to make it more accessible. Even people who are naturally frisky tend to regard it as second-best sex, but not us. We regard it as safe sex, and we're providing an outlet for those who enjoy pleasuring themselves in a semi-public setting. So let the Masturbate-a-thon commence."

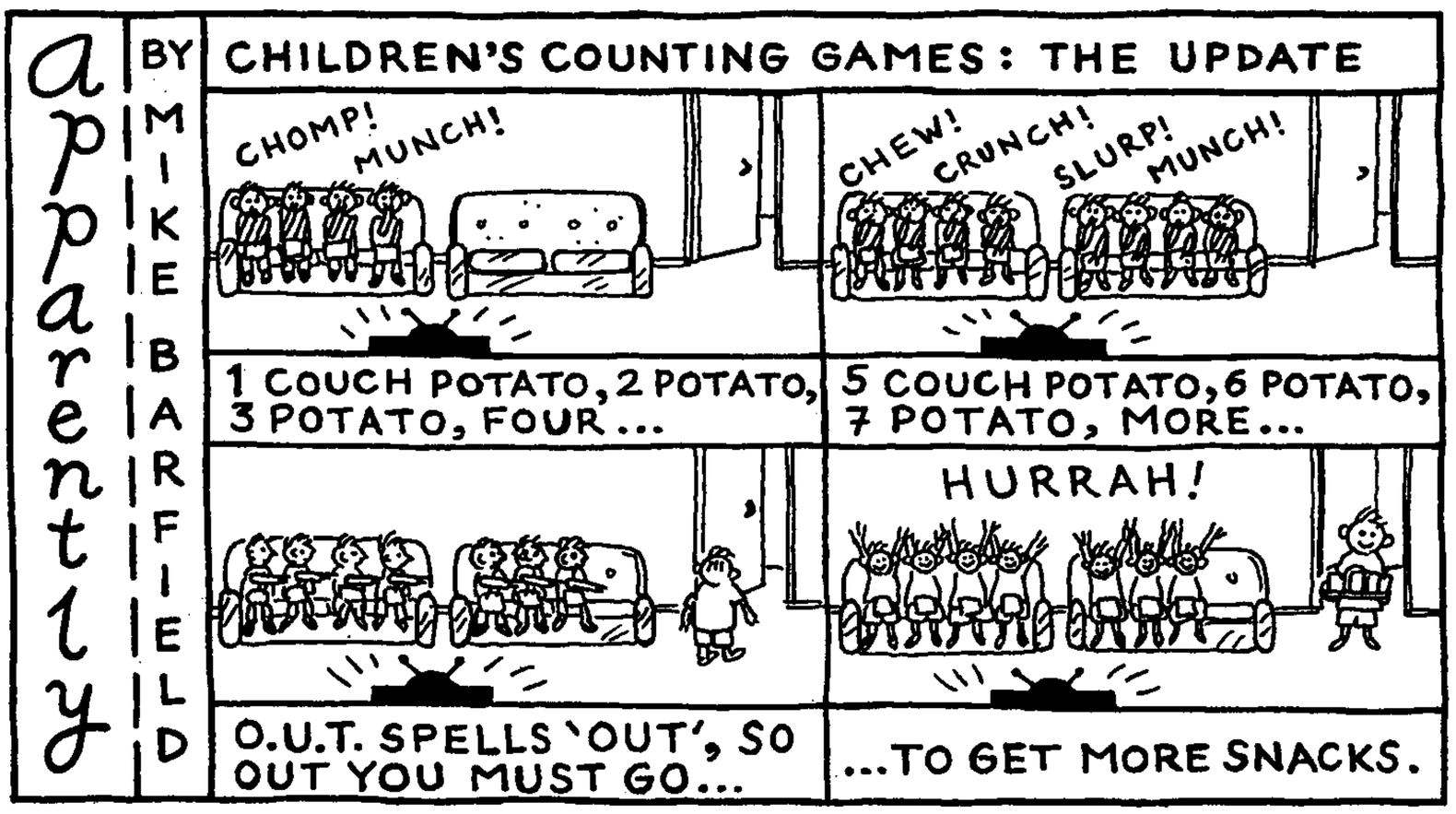
With those words, Ms Queen opened San Francisco's annual self-pleasuring event, attended by more than 120 men and women (aged from 20 to 60), all of whom masturbated for up to eight hours. "It's interesting to be sexual in public," said Melissa Gira, who was overseeing the evening's web cast, "because these are things we aren't sexually socialised to do." Tony from Central Valley agreed, adding "I grew up believing that this was a horrible nasty thing to do, but the whole point of this is coming out and openly making love to your best friend, your right hand."

This year's Masturbate-a-thon was won by a New Yorker who wished to remain anonymous, and who shattered the previous endurance record of six-and-a-half hours (with a permitted five-minute break every hour). But last year's winner, Norine Dworkin, declined to take part this year. "To be honest," she admitted, "after the first hour, it becomes about as pleasurable as rubbing your elbow." *(Hartford Advocate, 15/5/05. Spotter: Andy Davison)*

– ● –

●*"When the patient arrived at the hospital with his mother," Dr Yuri Tanvel told a press conference in Moscow, "he was fully conscious, but complaining of a headache. His mother told me that he'd hammered a nail into his own forehead, but I didn't realise how long it was until we X-rayed him. It was 122 millimetres long, and had gone deep into his brain, yet it didn't seem to have affected him at all, although he would certainly have died from a haemorrhage if he'd tried to remove it himself. As it was, we had to perform a trepanation, and cauterise several blood vessels in the brain before we could remove it. Had the trajectory of the nail been just a few degrees different, he would have killed himself instantly. He's very lucky to be alive."*

Later, the mother of thirty-seven-year-old Yuri Dedov explained what had happened. "My son often hears voices, and yesterday he told me he'd heard a voice that kept saying 'take a hammer and do it.' Later on, I found him trying to hammer a rusty old nail into his head, so I told him not to do it, in case the dirty nail gave him blood poisoning. He seemed to get the message, but this morning he went to the hardware store and bought some clean new nails, and I found him later on, lying on the floor with blood on the crown of his head. He said he had a headache, and asked for a beer, but when I saw the nail sticking out, I decided to call an ambulance instead. To be honest, he's been acting strangely for some time now, ever since a dilapidated staircase fell on his head." (Pravda, 6/6/05. Spotter: Anon)


apparently
BY MIKE BARFIELD
CHILDREN'S COUNTING GAMES: THE UPDATE
CHOMP! MUNCH!
1 COUCH POTATO, 2 POTATO, 3 POTATO, FOUR...
O.U.T. SPELLS 'OUT', SO OUT YOU MUST GO...
CHEW! CRUNCH! SLURP! MUNCH!
5 COUCH POTATO, 6 POTATO, 7 POTATO, MORE...
HURRAH!
...TO GET MORE SNACKS.

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Important notice

The vicar and his family are currently enjoying a well-deserved break, but for security reasons we are unable to reveal in which part of the world they are spending their holiday. Nevertheless we are grateful to Tony for giving up some of his valuable recreation time to pay his tribute to a much loved and loyal colleague, our late organist Mr. Cook.

The Vicar's Tribute

Hullo, and a very sad 'hullo' it is on this sad occasion. The word has just reached me of the sad passing of Mr Cook while he was on holiday in his native Scotland.

Our thoughts naturally go out to the two Mrs Cooks at this very sad time.

All of you, I am sure, will have your own memories of Robin. But I have more than most.

When I arrived in this parish I had no hesitation in appointing him to the supremely important post of our parish organist.

Here was a man supremely fitted for the job to which history had called him.

Blessed with a brilliant and agile brain, an impish sense of humour and a single-minded dedication to the task in front of him, he was also one of the finest public speakers our parish has ever known.

His witty and acerbic speeches at our annual harvest suppers were a delight which none of us will ever forget.

And above all Robin had an unshakeable sense of loyalty.

Or so I thought! But then, alas, the day came when I began to realise that Robin had his own agenda.

I'm sure you will all remember those dark days when the Rev. Dubya called us all to stand together in support of his great crusade to eliminate the Evil One from the world.

Never was it more important that the parish team should stick together and present

THE VICAR MOURNS: As seen by local artist Mr De La Nougerede

a united front in the face of the threat that then confronted us.

But for reasons known only to Robin he chose instead to break ranks and to make every effort to undermine the great cause on which we had embarked.

Far be it for me at this particularly sad time to rake up unhappy memories from the past, when we are all quite rightly recalling Robin's many sterling qualities, few though they may have been.

But I have to say that his conduct at that time and subsequently was the most unforgivable act of treachery I have known in my long career in the church!

It is perhaps idle to speculate as to what Robin's true motivation was in betraying me as he did at that time.

Many of you, I know, who heard him speak at various occasions at that time were of the opinion that poor Robin had experienced some kind of mental breakdown.

I would perhaps prefer a more charitable explanation.

It was no secret that Robin had a particular fondness for the drink associated with his native Scotland.

Again his visits to the betting shop bore sad testament to the addiction to gambling which sadly had him in its grip.

No wonder that his manner of speech became the object of ridicule. Attention was also inevitably drawn to his ridiculous beard and staring eyes!

For a long time I tried to overlook his manifest failings and to turn a blind eye to his absurd and outrageous conduct.

But in the end I had to remember that there are few words in the English language bigger and more important than that seven letter word 'Loyalty'.

And this was the word, it seemed, that Robin had forgotten the meaning of.

It was bad enough that he should have shown such a lack of loyalty to me as his vicar.

But, hey, I can take that! That's my job!

What I think none of us can forgive, or should, is Robin's heartless betrayal of his faithful and long-suffering wife Margaret.

When rumours first reached me of certain goings-on in the organ loft between Robin and the girl he got in to turn the pages of his music and to stay behind to collect up the hymn books, I tried to turn a deaf ear.

But in the end Robin's behaviour became so shameless that my patience gave way.

I knew that I had to get tough. So I asked Mr Campbell to ring him up and order him to get divorced at once, to prevent any further scandal in the parish.

I know a lot of you will be saying that I should have let bygones be bygones, and flown home to pay my last respects at Robin's funeral.

But I don't think you realise how inconvenient this would have been, not to mention the expense involved.

I am sure you appreciate that I and my family don't get many days off in the course of a hard working year, and to expect me to break off from my well earned holiday in honour of a man who, frankly, I held in the utmost contempt, would be ridiculous.

Even if I was still back at home in the vicarage, I knew that it would be hard to justify dropping important parish business to pay homage to a man who not only stabbed me in the back but also abandoned his wife and family to run off with his secretary!

Yours ever

Tony

P.S. Apologies to Mr Prescott, who I know had been struggling to pen his usual August newsletter to you all while he is 'holding the fort' in my absence. But I am sure we will somehow find room for his effort next year (which will also give us time to correct any spelling mistakes!)

KIDZ HOLIDAY QUIZ

Where's Tony? Can you guess where the vicar is on holiday? Just choose from these fun destinations and you could win a free trip round the vicarage with Mr Prescott!

Is it:

a) Skegness?

b) Bournemouth?

c) One of his rich friends' luxury villas on the island of Grand Fribi in the Caribbean?

Parish Postbag

From Mr Blunkett, formerly in charge of our Neighbourhood Watch

Dear Sir,

I hereby give notice that in the vicar's absence, at this time when we are all under attack from the 'enemies within', I have taken charge, as I am far more experienced in these matters than anyone else in the parish, particularly Mr Prescott who frankly does not know his

Yours faithfully
D Blunkett
Grace and Favour House
Posh Street

The editor reserves the right to cut all letters for reasons of space. J. P.

THE LISTENING PARISH

Are you a member of an ethnic minority? Then come and meet the PCC's new inclusivity co-ordinator Hazel Blears. Next week she will be out and about in the Parish, seeking the views of anyone who may be suffering from identity crisis as to how they would like to be classified - e.g. Eskimo-Irish, Bangladeshi-Jewish, Chinese-American-Indian etc.

Hazel will be at these venues next week:
Wed. 10 - 11. *Safekwik Supermarket*, Falconer Drive.
***Thurs.* 10 - 11.** *Hislop's Sports Boutique*, Staplehurst Road.
Fri. 10 - 11. *'Poor Pussy' Veterinary Clinic*, Wapshott Avenue.
Sat. 10 - 11. *DVD Centre* (formerly the public library) Milburn Lane
or log on to www.hazelshereforyou.blog.spot.com

To Remember In Your Prayers

● Mr McCririck, who I gather made a fool of himself at Mr Cook's funeral. Let us pray that this unfortunate self-publicist with his silly hats and ridiculous sideburns may gain a speedy exit from a world that obviously troubles him. May he be given the wisdom to see that those who chose not to attend the funeral were honouring Mr Cook just as much as those who drank too much and talked nonsense at the service! T.B.

Holiday Special

Visit the Vicarage!!!

In the vicar's absence, ordinary parishioners can have the rare opportunity to visit the vicarage and to be given a personal guided tour by 'the man in charge', John Prescott.

Says one lucky holidaymaker, Mrs Patel: "The family were just walking past the vicarage hoping to catch a glimpse of the vicar sitting at his desk writing one of his sermons, when a stout gentleman rushed out and said 'they're away, him and his missus. Why don't I show you round. He's left me the key!'

Imagine our surprise when only minutes later we were given a privileged glimpse of the room in which the vicar does it five times a night!"

Opening hours: Weekdays 9-5
Closed weekends. Coach parties catered for by arrangement.

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

No.94 SALMAN RUSHDIE

As one of the leading thinkers on the current state of Islam, and with your new book *Midnight Spoons* tipped to win this year's Booker prize, how do spoons fit into your view of the world?

My feeling is that traditional Islamic teaching on the subject of spoons is a symptom of the much wider crisis confronting the whole of the Muslim world, as it so signally fails to adapt to the changing context in which Islam is now having to operate.

But going back to spoons, do we find anything in the Koran which might throw light on the subject?

The failure of the Qu'ran even to mention spoons is irrelevant when compared to the irrational selectivity with which modern day Islamo-fascists have re-interpreted that book, oblivious to the fact that it is only essentially a historic document which is why when we try to...

May I just at this point...

...so the younger generation of Muslims experience a sense of alienation as they are brought up in a world so different from that which is...

At this point I usually ask whether anything amusing has ever happened to you, but I can tell that the answer is no.

NEXT WEEK: *Condoleeza Rice, 'Me And My Rice'.*

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Barbara Bel Geddes

So. Farewell
Then Barbara
Bel Geddes

Miss Ellie of
Dallas fame.

I never saw
Dallas myself

So I do
Not know
Whether you
Had a
Catchphrase.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

PS. Also, Farewell
King Fahd of Saudi Arabia
You were also in the
Oil business.

Spooky.

NEW BOOKS

The Life of Graham Lord

by **John Mortimer**

Shocking new biography of the much-loved former Sunday Express books editor shows that Lord is not the genial wordsmith of public perception but is in fact ruthless manipulator and hatchet man who:

● specialises in malicious biography
● attacks old men in wheelchairs for his own profit
● may not write his own books but merely "copies them out of old cuttings".

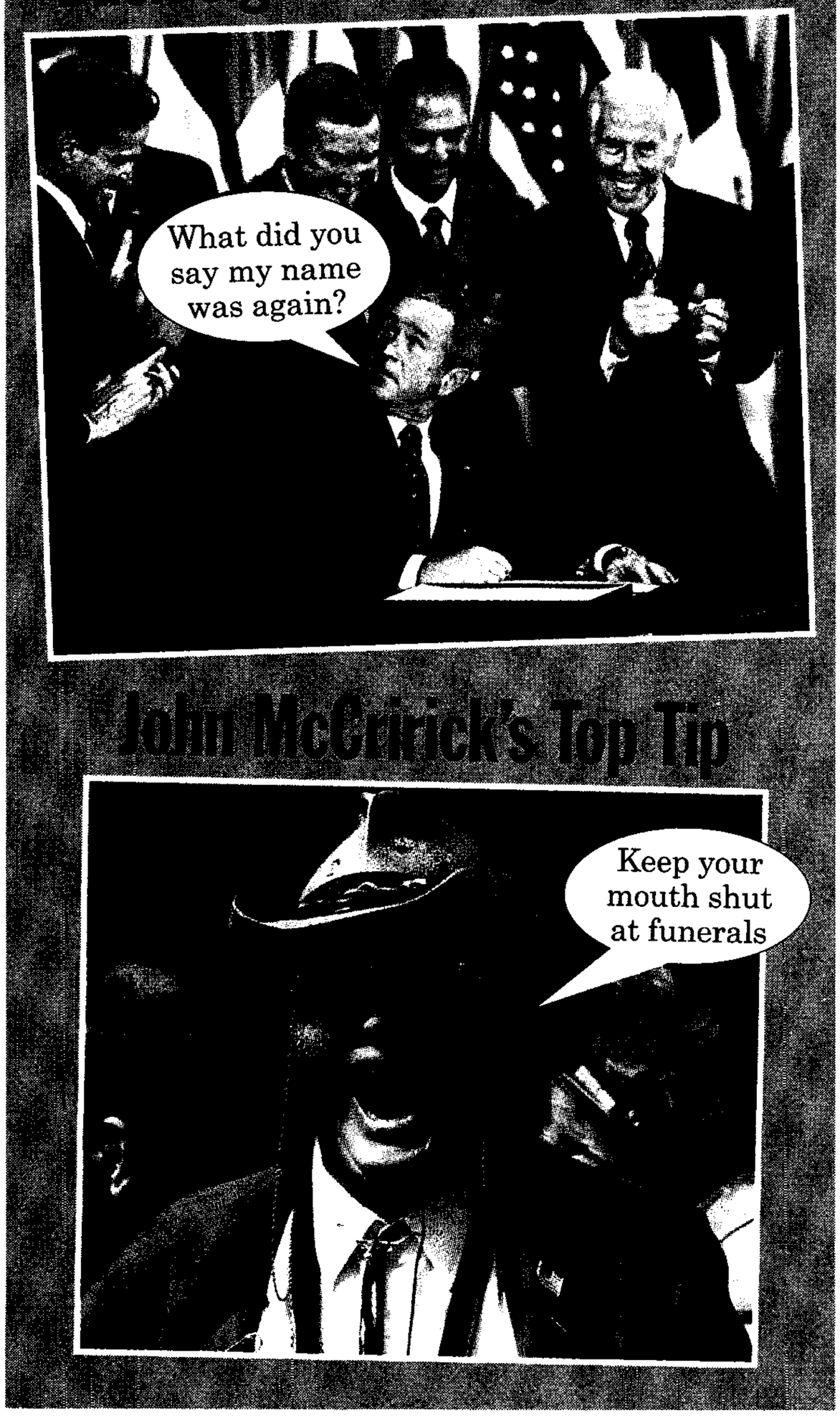
(That's enough. Ed.)

COOK FUNERAL SHOCK

THE WEEK IN PICTURES

Royal cash for access

Bush signs trade agreement



John McCririck's Top Tip

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S SILLY SEASON SIZZLER!?!

■ HATS OFF to Posh!?! At last someone's had the guts to admit that books are boring and we don't want to read 'em!?!? Let the snooty eggheads sneer but I say this – what's wrong with Posh just reading a few articles in glamour magazines and newspapers like this one!?!? We'd all rather read Auntie Glenda's words of wisdom than the latest Booker Snoozerama from someone you've never heard of!? You're alright in my book, Posh, even if you won't read it?!?!

■ *POSH SPICE!? What a disgrace!?! What sort of example are you setting to your kiddies when you say you haven't even read Harry Potter?!? Talk about illiterate!?! We always knew you were stoopid but we didn't know your kids should be taken into care as well?!?! We should throw the book at you, Posh, not that you'd read it!?! (You've done this, Ed).*

■ PAULA RADCLIFFE!?! Arencha-sickofher?!? OK so the skinny beanpole has finally won something – Hoo-Bloody-Ray!?! It's about time too you big quitter!!? And this time you even did it without peeing in public – pardon my French!? Who cares?!? You're not even worth writing about!?!?

■ *PAULA RADCLIFFE!?!! Doncha-luvher!?! Britain's marathon miracle with the fastest legs on earth!?! When all the other athletes were a droppin' and a floppin' on the track only plucky Paula put some pride back into Britain?!? And without pooping herself to boot!!?! – Excuse my French!!? Three cheers for Golden Gal Paula!!?! Hip!Hip!Hoo Cares!!?! (Is this right?? Ed).*

■ SO BRIDGET Jones' Diary is back in the Independent!?! Do you know what this single gal thinks?! V. bad idea!!?! Geddit?!!.

■ SO JUDE and Siena, Kate and Crackhead Pete and Sadie and some other bloke are all back together or split up, I'm not sure which!?! Give us a break Mr Noozman and write about something else?!!.

■ HERE they are – Glenda's Bank Holiday Bonkers:

● Omar Bakri – OK so he's a bearded nutter!?! But he can inflame my passions anytime!!?

● Sir Ian Blair – London's new supercop?!? If you can't find Terror's Mr Big you can always find my phone number in the book!??! Be seeing ya, Big Boy!!?!

● Shane Warne – Here's one maiden you can bowl over any time you like Cobber!?!? Geddit!!?!

Leg-Byeeee!!! (Geddit?!?!)

"These only need heating through, they're pre-burnt"

"I'm plucking up the courage to rebel over 24-hour drinking"

FATHER TO SUE LEADING PUBLIC SCHOOL

by Our Education Staff

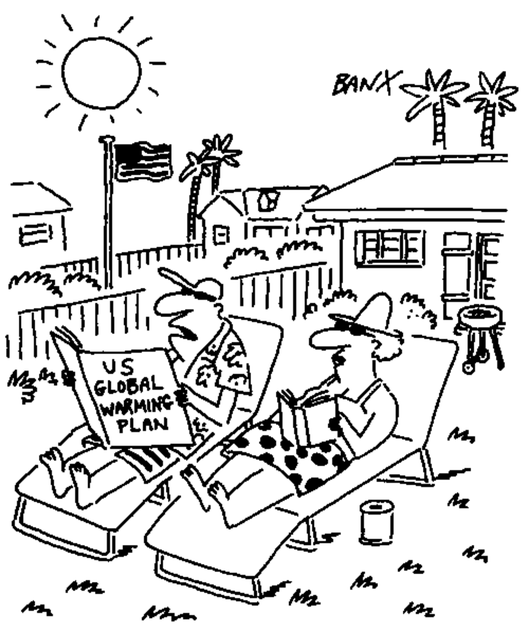
A FURIOUS parent is to begin legal action today against St Cakes the famous Midlands independent school, after the headmaster, Mr R. J. Kipling, tried to expel his son.

The boy, who cannot be named for legal reasons, is called Fotherington-Barkworth (Silvesters) and has been accused of burning down the chapel and failing to get 12A*s at GCSE.

Said the headmaster, "I might be prepared to overlook the former offence as youthful high spirits, but the latter really does show that this boy is irredeemable".

Marlborough Country

Said the father of the alleged arsonist and exam failure, "It is grossly unfair that public schools and state schools have different standards on these issues. I pay a lot of money to St Cakes and in return my son should be allowed to do whatever he feels like".



"It's too hot to worry about global warming"

AIR TRAVEL MISERY

By Our Air Travel Correspondent
The Late Edward Heathrow

THERE WERE angry scenes at Heathrow yesterday when it was regretfully announced that a flight would not be cancelled due to industrial action.

Said one typical holiday-maker about to board the flight to Florida, "I am gutted. There is a test match on the TV, and I won't be able to watch it".

Said another disgruntled English traveller, "I only agreed to go away at this time in the sure knowledge that I would be back here in front of the telly by teatime".

Michael Vaughan is 94 not out.

Late News
Air Passenger Food Strike Fury

HOLIDAY-MAKERS were up in arms yesterday at the prospect of the lightning strike by airline food handlers being called off. Said one outraged traveller, Dave Spriggit, about to board his Air Malta flight to Faro, "I was looking forward to not having the disgusting in-flight meal, consisting of scalding hot ham 'n' cheese panini, a grape in a plastic container and a blueberry muffin". Scarcely able to conceal his disappointment, the shaven-haired builder from St Austell continued, "My wife had made us all cheese and pickle sandwiches and fresh fruit. We've had to throw these away and will be forced to land in Faro feeling ill".

DAILY MAIL

IS IT FALSE OR NOT?

by Our Hair to the Throne Correspondent **Maddy Tup**

THE question everyone in the office (me, Barbara, Courtney and the girl from work experience, who I think is called Stephanie but I may be wrong) was asking last night is: is our story about Prince Charles' hair weave completely false?

The signs are all there. The story is so thin. It has no roots. It's just a bald lie. But yet the strands have been woven together in such a way as to fool people into thinking it was the genuine article.

What do you think: Is this story genuine or fake?

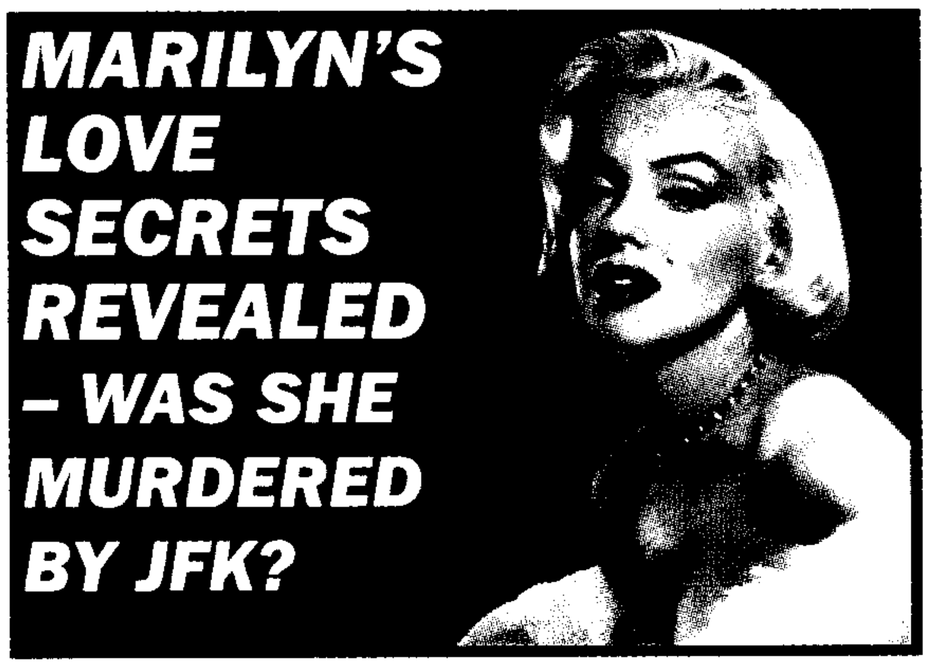
Call the Daily Mail wig line, and ask to speak to Barbara, Courtney or possibly Stephanie, because I'm going on holiday as soon as I've finished this hair piece. *(geddit?)*

"We're in trouble – the parents like us!"

YOUR NEW-LOOK, SUPER SOARAWAY

Mailly Telegraph

FRIDAY, AUGUST 19, 2005



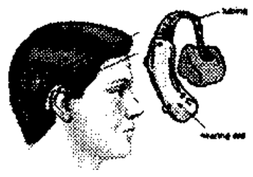
PLUS SUPER SEXY SUDOKU p. 28

OI, BEARDIE, BUGGER OFF!

THE MAD MULLAH of Neasden, Lurpak Bashir-al-Luni, last night continued to pour out a litany of hate from the pulpit of his North-West London mosque in Neasden's leafy Tesco Street (now renamed Jihad Crescent).

Al-Luni told 20,000 screaming followers (Sayed and Dorissa Bonkir), "Rise and destroy the infidel wherever you find him".

And, if this was not enough, the Mailograph has learned, this crazed imam now wants the British taxpayers to buy him a new hearing aid on the NHS (estimated cost £39.70).



THE TELEGRAPH SAYS ...

Enough is enough. Wake up, Mr Blair, and send this potty Paki packing!

The Latest Stream Of Poison From Neasden's Hate Cleric

- **"The West is in a state of total corruption and decadence"**
- **"We should rise up and kill Queen Victoria. She has a lot to answer for"**

Wine and cake followed in the church room, The parish barbecue followed in the Vicarage Garden, when parishioners tucked into sizzling sausages and burghers in gracious shade,

W. Sussex Gazette

Rhubarb woman gets custody

A WOMAN convicted of assault for hurling rhubarb at her brother was behind bars today.

Yorkshire Evening Press

★ BAGHDAD TIMES ★
Friday 19 August 2005

HATE FIGURE FLEES BRITAIN

by Our British Correspondent Omar Bakri

MUSLIMS worldwide were celebrating last night as news spread that the preacher of hate against Muslims, Tony Blair, had fled Britain for a sun-drenched villa in the Caribbean.

"Blair's departure is a day of great celebration for all Muslims," said one leading Islamic Cleric speaking from Lebanon.

"Blair's preaching in support of George Bush's illegal invasion of Iraq and the subsequent slaughtering of countless thousands of innocent Muslims is an abhorrence to all right-thinking people."

Muslim leaders said they hoped that other extremists who backed the war would now follow Blair's lead and flee the country to ease tensions in Britain.

TOUGH ON TERROR
Blair's latest crackdown

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

Before leaving for a two-month holiday at an undisclosed destination, prime minister Tony Blair announced a raft of new measures to curb what he called "the greatest threat our civilisation has ever faced".

Those Blair measures in full:

1. Courts in permanent 24-hour session to try terrorists.
2. Police to be given new powers to arrest anyone who has committed a terrorist act.
3. Law of treason to be invoked against all known or suspected terrorists.
4. Hate clerics such as Neasden's Imam Al-Luni to be taken to cashpoints to pay on-the-spot fines up to £50.
5. A new offence, the "Intention to Incite", is to be introduced, with the police empowered to hold suspects indefinitely.
6. All judges who invoke the Human Rights Act to be deported without trial.
7. The prime minister to go on holiday for security reasons.

Full story: pages 2-24.

THE Sun SAYS

ONCE again the toffee-nosed Booker Prize toffs of the book world have insulted the intelligence of the millions of people who don't read books.

Who's ever heard of their list of highbrow yarnspinners that passes for a good read.

Salman Rushdie? Julian Barnes? Ian Whatsisname? Big hitters from the world of words? You've gotta be kidding!

The *Sun* says here's the Booker book list that'll get Britain's bookworms crawling into WH Smiths:

- Wayne Rooney – *My Story*
- David Beckham – *My Story* part 7
- Jordan – *My Pair of Stories*

THE Sun ALSO SAYS

COWARDLY Sheikh Oman Bakri has fled Britain before he could be strung up. Shame!

There is only one punishment fit for those preaching messages of hate: Get a job on the Sun! *(Surely, 'Go back where you came from'? Ed.)*

DOWNING STREET SECURITY ALERT

Late News

GOVERNMENT DEFENDS 24 HOUR DRINKING

THE government said today that it was vitally important that they push ahead with their plans for 24 hour drinking despite the opposition of senior judges.

"24 hour drinking will make the streets of Britain so dangerous that no terrorist bomber in his right mind will go anywhere near them", said a jubilant Home Office.
(cont. p. 94)

GOVERNMENT REBRANDING LATEST

THE Home Office has confirmed the first of the ethnic re-brandings announced by Home Office Minister Hazel Blears.

"Hazel Blears is now going to be known as 'that stupid woman they've left in charge whilst Charles Clarke is sunning himself in Florida'," said a senior Whitehall
(cont. p. 94)

NASA PROMISES INVESTIGATION

NASA has promised a full investigation after the space-shuttle Discovery failed to blow up whilst re-entering the Earth's atmosphere.

"We did everything humanly possible in the build-up to this mission to ensure a Columbia-style disaster", said a bemused NASA spokesman, "we've ignored the warning signs when take-off had to be suddenly aborted two weeks ago, then our rushed re-scheduling of the launch meant that a number of heat-insulating tiles were damaged in the process.

"Those brave astronauts should be toast by now, we just can't understand what went right".
(cont. p. 94)

10 of the best

No. 94 **COATHANGERS** Chosen by Philippa Page

No Frills

Asda's "Eezihang", made in China from PVC, bravely sticks to the traditional design. 99p

BEST BUY

Durable

M&S have come up with a new range of long-lasting Italian-style hangers, the "Milano", the "Torino" and the "Seville". £9.99 for set of three.

Upmarket

The "Coathanger's coathanger", the "Burlington" is a superbly engineered Finnish design made from rainforest teak. Only available from Piltdown's of Jermyn Street. £59.99.

Going away?

The "Traveller-De Luxe" from Monty's of Crouch End is a revolutionary new concept in coathangers, folding away into the size of a cigarette packet when not in use. £19.99.

Top of the Range

The "Highgrove", marketed by the Duchy of Cornwall (all profits to charity) is hand-made in Poundbury, Dorset, to an 18th century design by Quinlan Terry. Six-month waiting list. £325.99 (plus p&p).

Free 'n easy

BEST BUDGET BUY

Perhaps the best-value of all, this ultra-basic hanger is given away free to all customers of the fast-expanding Mr Staingone dry-cleaning chain. *(That's enough coathangers, Ed.)*

CELIBACY ROW ROCKS CHURCH

by Our Religious Correspondent **Phil Pews**

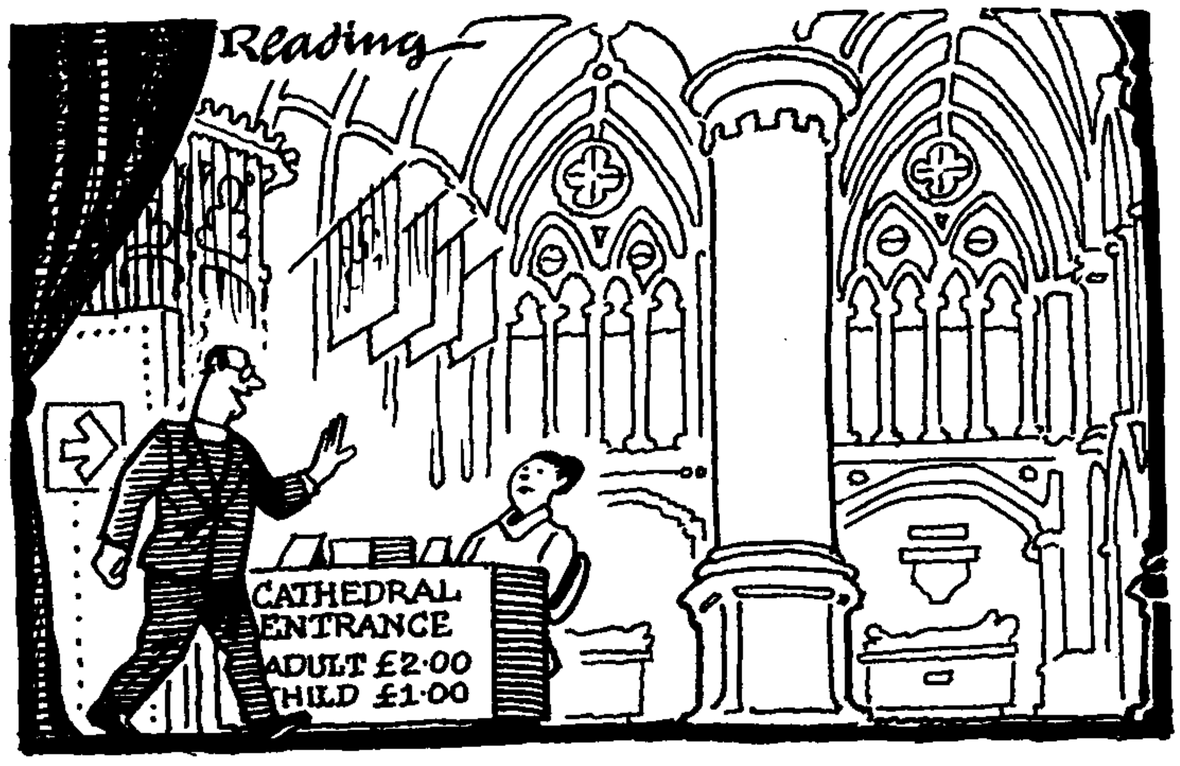
THE Church of England was last night reeling from the announcement by Droitwich vicar Justin Proundtrouser (38) that he was taking the vow of celibacy in marriages 'very seriously'. He explained that he and his partner would have every intention of observing their celibate status and not causing a crisis following their nuptials.

A Lambeth Palace spokesman was quick to denounce the Rev. Proudtrouser saying "We have given gay vicars every opportunity to flout our ruling in private. But now, here is a gay vicar who is determined not to create any trouble."

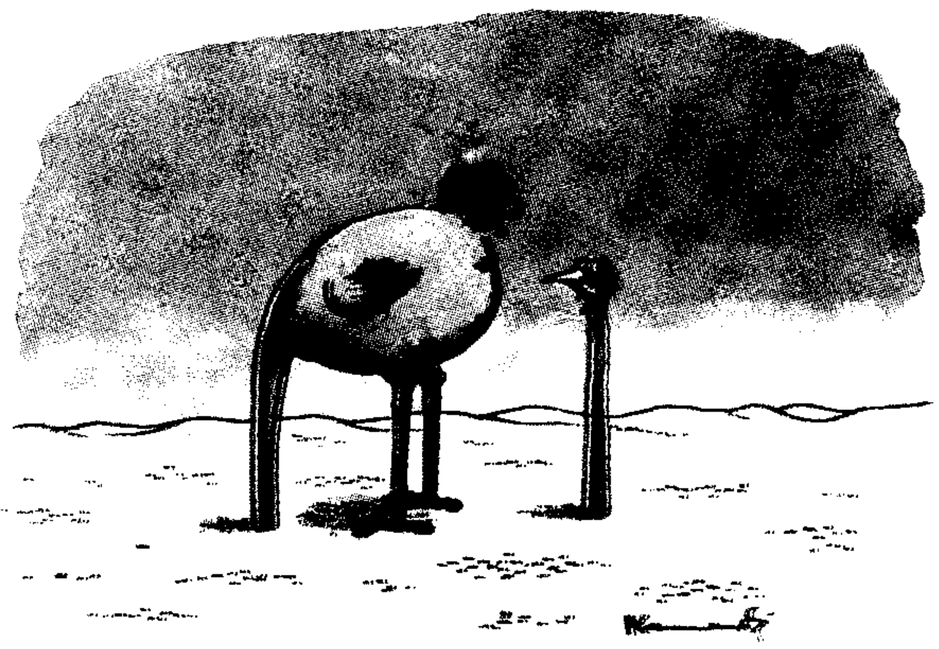
Say "I Don't"

He continued, "When we said this was a matter for their own conscience, we didn't expect anyone to take us seriously. The church may never be same again".

There were many calls last night from lesbian and gay clerics for Proudtrouser to resign.



"I'm trade"



What The Eye Says

THE SHAME OF BRITAIN'S BINGE LAW-MAKING

BRITAIN faces an epidemic of round-the-clock law-making which threatens to plunge the country into a new Dark Age.

Evidence is mounting to show that the government's policy of 24-hour law-making is producing nothing but confusion and chaos in the streets of all our major cities.

Citizens no longer have any idea of what is or is not legal, and many, it is clear, are so bemused that they no longer even know which country they are living in.

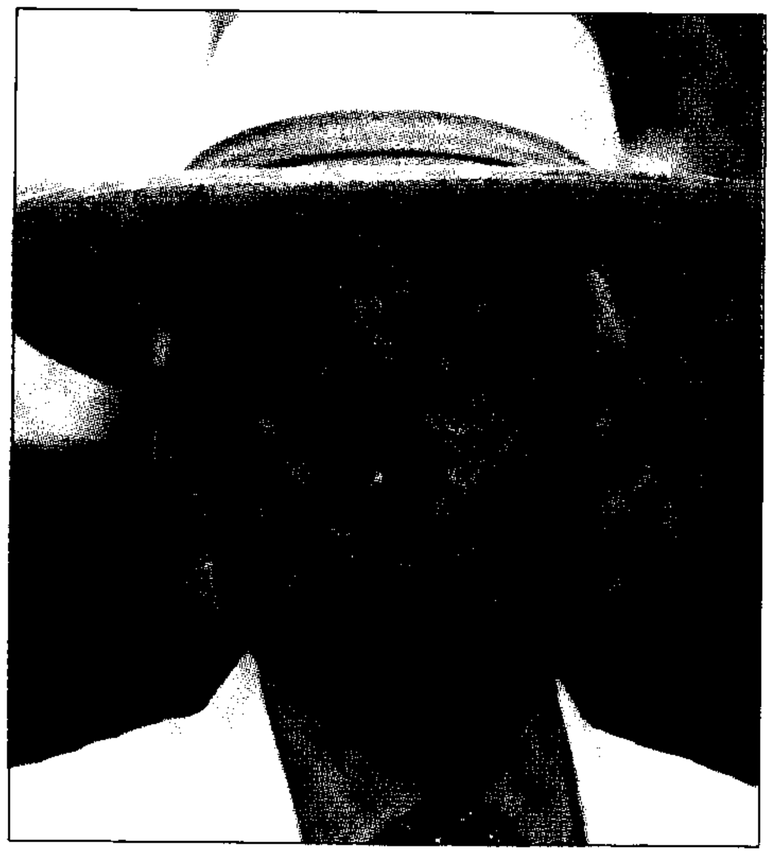
An only too typical scene of life in Britain today was witnessed by shocked observers recently in the heart of London's once-respectable Westminster, only a stone's throw from Buckingham Palace.

Groups of middle-aged men and women could be seen sprawling about on green, leather benches, in an all-night session of reckless law-making.

"I've never seen anything like it," said one horrified New Zealand tourist, Mary Maori, 26. "These people were totally out of control, just spewing out law after law. It was sickening."

We say this: *It is time this shameful madness was stamped out once and for all. There ought to be a law against it.*

DIARY



SIR ROY STRONG'S SUMMER MEMORIES

"Une glace petit, s'il vous plait, monsieur!"

"Come again, guv?"

Why do the English working-classes always *insist* on lowering the tone? One asks for an ice-cream, only to have one's request thrown back in one's face. Thank goodness one's second name is Persistence.

"An ice-cream in a cone, *por favor*!"

"One lump or two, guv?

"Oooh! Cheeky! Are my trunks really so tight?!"

I am dreadfully prone to fits of giggles. Whene'er I feel an attack coming on, my mind harks back to one's most dear and darling friend, HM Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mama. A priceless jewel beyond compare, she could make an entire room simply *hoot* with laughter with a simple flick of her perfectly-formed thumb and forefinger.

One's mind travels back to a trip to the seaside with that most remarkable lady in the summer of '77. It was, I suppose, quite a leap for a thirty-six-year-old grammar school boy to be going to the beach with a queen – or at least with *that* queen.

"I was going to ask the same of *vous*!" he replied. But then I noticed his peaked hat and driving gloves, imperfectly hidden beneath his capacious BTM. All was explained – Queen Elizabeth had hired him as our driver!

As usual, Queen Elizabeth had assembled a wonderfully broad cross-section of guests: Cecil Beaton, Johnnie Gielgud, Bunny Roger, Norman Hartnell and – to even up the numbers – Danny la Rue. She herself boarded the *charabanc* looking positively radiant in beachwear consisting of a wonderful ballgown in violet and crimson taffeta, the most perfectly pure white silk opera gloves and diamante flippers, all topped off with a splendid pink ostrich feather hat and a snorkel.

"All aboard!" said Norman, our driver, with a delightful tinkle of his little bell – and off we whooshed.

I was the first to disembark. Someone needed to prepare the way for the arrival *sur le plage* of Queen Elizabeth, and if the task fell to me, then so be it.

There were the inevitable children digging up the sand, willy-nilly, with their hideous buckets and spades."We'll have to get rid of these simply *ghastly* little castles!" I muttered to Cecil, "They have no style or elan! I mean, even if one were squat enough to fit in them, one still wouldn't be able to live with all that *sand*! One would sooner live in a *common little bungalow* than in one of *those*!"

Accordingly, I collared the vulgar little "kiddies", and crisply informed them that HM Queen Elizabeth would be arriving imminently, so to flatten their castles forthwith and make themselves scarce. I then turned my attention to the sea. "Is there no way we could think of a way to make it a deeper blue" I asked Cecil, "and perhaps a little less *foamy*?" I sighed. But answer came there none.

Queen Elizabeth loved presents and I always arrived clutching one. Her reaction was invariably one of almost childlike delight, expressed by a demure downturn of the eyelashes and the clasping of the proffered present close to her breast in a moment of ecstasy.

I once arrived with a bright pink envelope. Her attention never wandered from it for one moment. "Oh, my dear! My absolute favourite! Money!" she exclaimed, delightedly opening her handbag, thrusting the £50 note into it, snapping it tightly shut and giving it to Ruth, Lady Fermoy for safekeeping, all in one characteristically gracious movement.

The next time I arrived – and I shall never forgive myself – with only a £20 note, plus two pounds and fifty six pence in loose change. Queen Elizabeth accepted the envelope (this time in a delicate fuschia) with her usual rapture, but as she ripped it open it I detected a momentary look of the most utter, utter disappointment, amounting even to desolation. She recovered her poise magnificently, of course, and only the keenest of ears would have heard her anguished mutter of "four-eyed skinflint" before that radiant smile reappeared, like the sun rising o'er the dark and stormy sea.

And so to *maintenant*. Another beach, another holiday. The day begins with me dressing my darling cats – The Right Honourable Peter Pussykins, the Earl and Countess of Crawl, Lady Davinia Shameless-Arselicker and Little Lord Tom Twat – up in their Victorian beachwear and telling them to mind their manners and not to go too near the water.

"You must remember, my little pussies" I tell them, "That at the tender age of 26, your master became the youngest-ever Director of the National Portrait Gallery, no less, by the age of 27 he was being invited to dine by Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret-Rose, the sister of Her Majesty the Queen and before he turned 30 he was setting tables of Duchesses a-roar with laughter at his finely-honed anecdotes concerning the dullness of unimpressive dons!"

The cats are noticeably impressed, purring with simple pleasure at my fond reminiscences. "To some extent" I continue, excitedly, "one foxes everyone by simultanaeously being scholar and academic, populariser and communicator, and sticking to the belief that these are not incompatible!"

Could it be just my imagination, or do these cats stand up on their hind legs and applaud as my little speech draws to its powerful close?

Together, the cats and myself parade along the sands, me in my stripey one-piece swimming togs, looking perhaps almost too like the divine Tadzio in Mr Mann's mournful masterpiece, Death in Venice. Close to the sea, the common folk are deliberately flying tawdry-coloured kites, making a hideous mess of the seascape. Thank heavens for a sharp pair of scissors, I say to myself, as I dip deep inside my Edwardian clutch-bag.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

Literary Review

We had it coming

Rape, a Love Story
Joyce Carol Oates
(Atlantic, £9.99)

A YOUNG widow is gang-raped by drug-crazed lowlifes, who set upon her as she walks home through a moonlit park with her 12-year-old daughter after a party. While the mother lies bleeding almost to death, the daughter goes for help. The first cop on the scene recognises the woman and vows to see that justice is done.

The question is, how? The rapists are arrested, but at a pre-trial hearing their wily lawyer outlines a defence somewhat preposterously based on both consent and mistaken identity. This, combined with a widespread local belief that, despite her near-death injuries, she somehow "had it coming", convinces the victim that a fair trial is hopeless. She decides not to testify.

Rape is, of course, a notoriously difficult offence to bring to trial. For the victim, there is a sort of ducking stool test. If she can survive reliving her ordeal in court, then the assumption is that it can't have been that awful, and the jury may well conclude that there was consent of a sort, or a misunderstanding fuelled by what was known or suspected of her sexual history (which is, of course, fair game regardless of its irrelevance). If, on the other hand, she is too traumatised by the rape itself to face the ordeal of a trial, her assailant will walk free even though the likelihood of her complaint being genuine is (according to the ducking stool logic) that much the greater.

The crime of rape is problematic in other ways; it is loaded with religious, cultural and gender-political issues, and while everyone agrees that the law is unsatisfactory, no one has been able to agree on what should be done. But now the novelist Joyce Carol Oates, who is also "distinguished professor of humanities at Princeton university", has come up with a very simple solution. Murder.

The solution is not, in fact, a new one. It is really quite medieval. Vengeance is mine, sayeth the cop. One by one, he picks off and terminates those evil rapists. And that is why *Rape* the novel is subtitled "A love story". He does it for love, you see. It is a respectful, courtly sort of love, offered by a latter day knight-errant, who undertakes his self-appointed tasks expecting nothing in return. Not that there's anything courtly or respectful about his methods, or the way they're described.

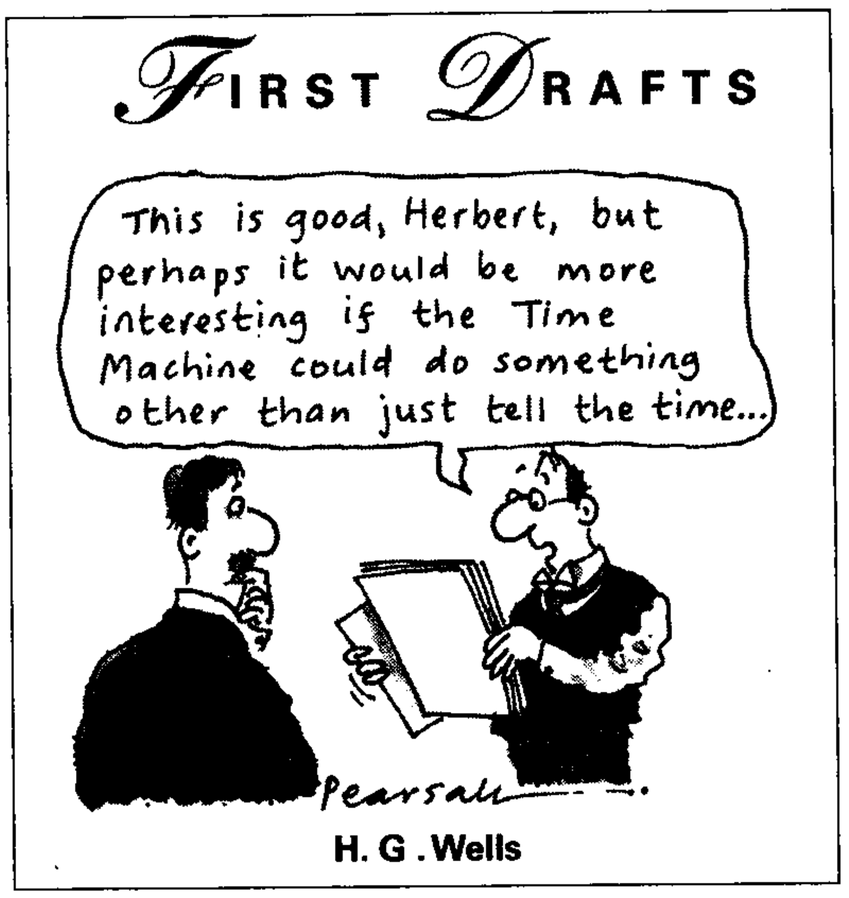
If (or more probably when) they make the movie, they can pitch it as *The Accused* (victim on trial) meets *Death Wish* (vigilante vengeance). But actually each of these films is a hundred times more subtle and morally ambiguous than this book, which is about as crude and simplistic as it gets. Oates, who is regularly held up as the latest in a series of Great American Novelists (right after Updike, Roth and Mailer), does not trust her readers to form their own conclusions.

Everything is hammered out in the most obvious way. The goodies may not be perfect, but they are certainly innocent; the baddies are wholly and irredeemably bad; the cop is just doing his job, and if he takes the law into his own hands, well, it's understandable, seeing as how it's so unfair. As for that devious defender: "A lawyer is basically a mouth, like a shark is a mouth attached to a long gut." That's your one stab at humour, by the way.

There is no light relief. The account of the harrowing gang-rape is itself deliberately harrowing, the injuries done to the victim recounted in injured, broken-backed, beaten-up prose. Whole paragraphs of dependent clauses have been torn off their main sentences and left piled up like severed limbs in a mortuary. Odd phrases and single words are left abandoned to fend for themselves. Although it is only 150 pages long, the book feels as exhausting to read as something four or five times that length. By the end of it, you are left in no doubt as to what you are supposed to think.

And the moral of the story is? Two wrongs do, after all, make a right.

This must be a comforting philosophy for Americans to hold right now, and it may be why Oates, despite being a prominent academic, member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, recipient of the National Book Award and Pulitzer finalist, is also a hot choice for Oprah's book club. You can almost hear them cheer and holler as the evil baddies go down like dominoes before the lone cop's avenging gun. Amen to that! Hallelujah! Yee-hah! Or indeed, ji-had!


FIRST DRAFTS
This is good, Herbert, but perhaps it would be more interesting if the Time Machine could do something other than just tell the time...
Pearsall
H. G. Wells

Man Booker Long List 2005

OF ALL the myriad pieces written to precede, accompany or follow last week's announcement of the 2005 Man Booker long list, by the far the most arresting was that produced by Jason Cowley in the *Observer*.

Mr Cowley, a former literary editor of the *New Statesman*, subsequently installed as head honcho of the *Observer Sports Monthly*, revealed that we were living in a Golden Age of the British novel. Ish, Salman, Julian, Zadie – gosh, weren't they just fab? It was all a pleasant change from the days when Mr C was a Booker judge and the parking lot was full of quaint little exercises in historical re-creation bumping their way into the available spaces. Even better, novelists were displaying an unexpected ability to cope with the demanding new conspectus brought by 9/11 and its aftermath, rather than retreating to the self-absorbed margins.

All fine, enthusiastic stuff, no doubt, and uncannily prophetic of what turned up three days later on the list, where Ish, Salman, Julian and Zadie could be found crowding out the cavalcade. On the other hand close inspection revealed that the novelist Jason here was really getting worked up about, and the only one who actually supported his 9/11 thesis, was Ian McEwan.

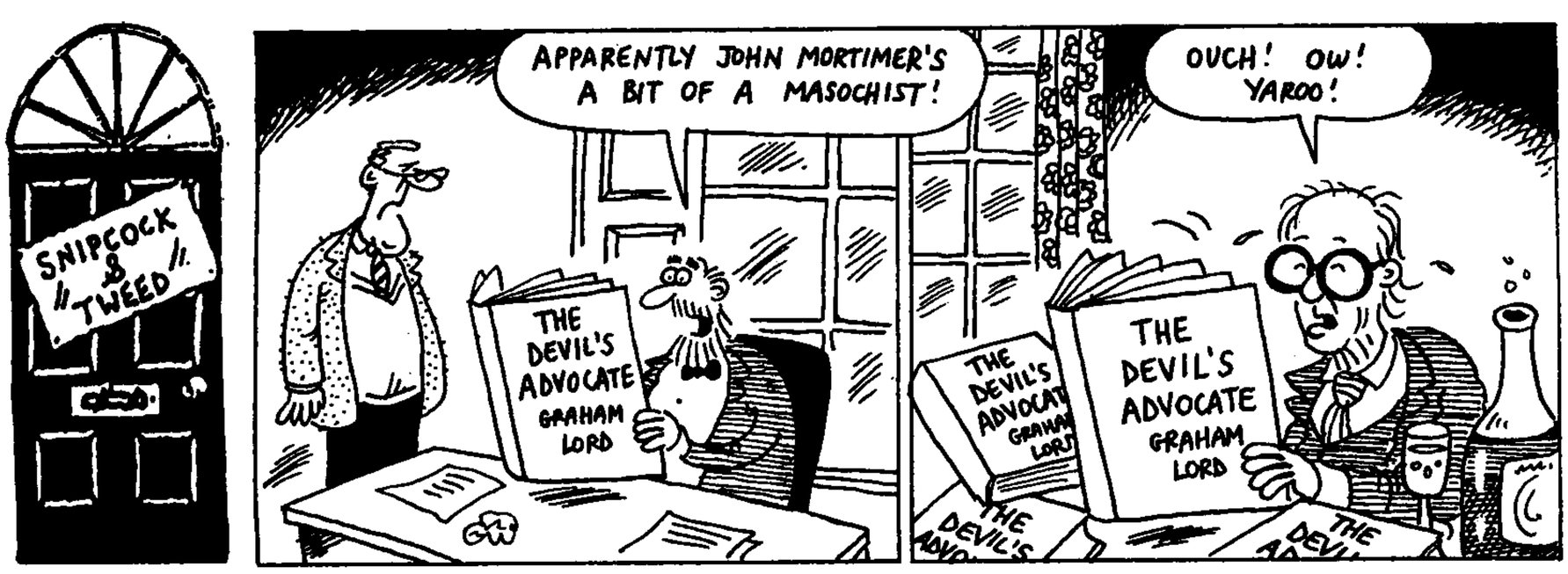
Doubtless it is a terrific heresy to say so, but *Saturday* – already installed as the bookies' favourite – is a bit of a dull book. Its dreariness lies not in its want of humour – a key McEwan failing since the bloke feminism of his apprentice years – but in its sedulous reversal of the process by which most novelists write novels.

Perowne, his medical hero, is not so much a plausible approximation of a human being as an extension of all the copious jottings McEwan clearly took in the gantry above the operating theatre and garnered from the countless back-numbers of the *Journal of Neurosurgery* that must litter his recycling tray. Thesis pre-dated character, and it shows.

Alas, the fuss that gets made over a novel like *Saturday* is only the symptom of a much wider malaise. Ish, Salman, Julian, Zadie and co: they are all decent novelists and, with occasional lapses, they write decent books. But oh, the fervour that greets their bi-annual offerings, a fervour, more to the point, that is quite factitious in its origins. British literary society at the present time is more than usually prey to a kind of Orwellian doublethink in which an Accepted View (held by bookworld insiders) is always balanced, or anaesthetised, by the Public View. Thus the Accepted View of Salman Rushdie is that another duff performance will ruin his career; the Public View, alternatively, salutes another titan of the novel.

There was an odd little illustration of this early in the year when proofs of Ish's *Never Let Me Go* started hitting the literary editors' desks. What a disappointment, they remarked to each other, before sitting down to commission the inevitable round of admiring reviews.

None of this, of course, does anyone any good. It does that noble institution "the novel" even less good. As for this year's long list, hailed by the chairman of the judges, John Sutherland, as the best since records began, it is terribly unadventurous, omits anything remotely left-field and allows no publisher beyond the established combines a look in. In an ideal world, the garland will go to Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black* (Fourth Estate); but as Mr Cowley's article demonstrated in spades, this is not an ideal world.


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
APPARENTLY JOHN MORTIMER'S A BIT OF A MASOCHIST!
THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE GRAHAM LORD
OUCH! OW! YAROO!
THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE GRAHAM LORD

Pseuds Corner

The initial blow was the equivalent of George Orwell's opening line of Nineteen Eighty-Four or the first bars of Strauss's Don Juan. Harmison grabbed his audience immediately, whereas McGrath was more Bohemian Rhapsody.

RICHARD HOBSON on the opening day of the first Ashes test, *Times*

Or consider the expression "like" – as in "I'm, like, so not ready for this whole, like, meeting my mother's oldest friend thing." Clunky adults think of this as a verbal tic, a vacuous place holder. But when skilfully deployed by those teenage girls, it acts as a framing device in conversations that are structured like TV commercials or movie trailers.

"Like" introduces a tiny performance, a "take" that displays a message, a fleeting pose in an ongoing string of imitative visuals that illustrate what the words describe. Life is one long show – and the media queens are the stars.

THOMAS DE ZENGOTITA,
'Why Teen Queens So Rule', Observer

Fleur's personal colour chart for the house encompasses "dried bay leaves" for the hall, "young bay leaves" for a bedroom, "egg yolk from a free-range chicken fed on plenty of maize" for the studio and back kitchen and "the grey of Somerset Levels white lias" (lias being a kind of fossilised stone) in a sitting room. But Francis has his own colour references: "He'll use the 18th-century name – for example, Brunswick Green."

Fleur and Francis Kelly renovate their Somersetshire farmhouse,
Telegraph Magazine

This paper develops a reading of the wardrobe which emphasises the wardrobe's location within the consumption practices of tidying, sorting and the displacement of clothing. Its emphasis is on the circulation of clothing matter and the transience of clothing consumption, not – as recent accounts have stressed – the accumulation, collection and wearing of clothing. Using primarily the example of maternity wear, the paper outlines how clothing circulates amongst and between women (between siblings, between friends and amongst neighbours and acquaintances) and accounts for this practice. It argues that maternity wear circulation is both an embodied divestment/recovery ritual and about the making of mothers, through its appeal to thrift, sacrifice and making-do. The paper concludes by reflecting on the significance of the absence of maternity wear from women's wardrobes and by suggesting that wardrobes need to be thought of not just as containers of memory, but as temporary holding places in the lives of clothes, and as pivotally positioned as a fulcrum for clothing movement, between wearing, storage and displacement.

Abstract of *'Wardrobe matter: the sorting, displacement and circulation of women's clothing'*, a paper by Nicky Gregson and Vikki Beale, Geography Department, University of Sheffield, Elsevier Geoforum website

CONTRIBUTORS: Rupert Heath, Keith Sellick, Claire West, Anon.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

NHS PRIVATISATION

Cheap at the price

IT'S been a good few months for David Lawrence, chief executive of Inventures, the NHS consultancy arm originally earmarked for privatisation along with NHS Estates but now undergoing what the department of health (DoH) calls a "managed closure".

Since *Eye* 1131 revealed that Lawrence was being paid by the NHS while he set up a new business, it has emerged that Lawrence and fellow managers have bought Inventures' most important assets at knock-down prices as they strike out on their own to run a consultancy firm that looks remarkably like, er, Inventures.

Especially useful to Lawrence and chums will be the "Inventures Innovations in Healthcare" and "Capitec" trademarks (price for the pair, £3) and the Inventures website (bought for £1,000), enabling them to lay claim to the consultancy outfit's history of providing services for other parts of government. And as a nice little bonus, "new" Inventures will take over existing NHS contracts at no cost and be paid to collect debts owed to "old" Inventures. As far as clients are concerned, therefore, not much has changed.

While the DoH claimed the public assets had no value to the government, the effect is that 18 months after the official privatisation proposal was abandoned (following findings by the national audit office of conflicts of interests), a valuable public body has passed seamlessly into the hands of its managers with no apparent competition or attempt to find the best price for the taxpayer.

Trading on Inventures' record in the public sector, Lawrence remains particularly keen to emphasise his firm's experience in performing "gateway reviews" – independent assessments of government IT projects at key points in their development. By a happy coincidence parliament's public accounts committee (PAC), reporting on the "delivery of major IT-enabled projects", recently announced that "gateway reviews, of all the [government] initiatives, have the most potential to secure improvements in IT procurement" and recommended that they be vastly increased.

Inventures boasts that it has already conducted 27 such reviews for clients including the home office and Inland Revenue, putting it in the perfect position to win further work on the government's ever-expanding IT programmes, not least in the NHS. One (doubtless hopelessly cynical) Inventures worker told the *Eye* that gateway reviews "are a licence to print money as the minimum daily charge-out is £1,000 for a team member and god knows what for a team leader". When Inventures was under public ownership such payments at least remained within the health service; now managers can happily trouser the lot – not a bad return on £1,003.

The NAO has refused to investigate fully the botched privatisation despite uncovering irregularities in its limited examination of a complaint from a disappointed bidder. Now that the "managed closure" has turned out to be privatisation in all but name, will it take a fresh look?

LOBBYING

Sovereign power

SPORTS minister Richard Caborn's reassurance to the head of Formula One's governing body, Max Mosley, that the ban on tobacco sponsorship coming into effect for the sport this month won't apply to broadcasts from outside the EU is the latest happy development in the warm relationship between the sport and "new" Labour.

Formula One famously won a deferral of the ban following Bernie Ecclestone's £1m donation to the party shortly before the 1997 election (subsequently returned); but motor racing has since turned to more subtle methods by employing the services of one of the best-connected lobbying firms, Sovereign Strategy.

Sovereign was set up in 2000 by Labour's former leader in the European Parliament, Alan Donnelly (pictured), who soon persuaded his old friend from the north-east and former cabinet minister Jack Cunningham to join the company, ignoring the bar on employing serving MPs imposed by the lobbying industry's professional body (which Sovereign conveniently failed to join).

Among the wealthy mates Donnelly had made during his time in Brussels was Max Mosley, who was reported in the *Sunday Times* six years ago to have paid Donnelly, then the European parliament's spokesman on the car industry, £18,000 for a "researcher" and to have funded several trips for the MEP to the US, Monaco and France. In return Mosley acquired a useful ally in Donnelly, especially when it came to brokering a deal with the European commission over competition issues.

When Donnelly alighted the European gravy train, Mosley's organisation, Federation Internationale d'Automobile (FIA), along with Ecclestone's Formula One group, duly became one of the first clients of his lobbying firm under arrangements that have recently been exposed in *BusinessF1* magazine to be every bit as unconventional as the parties to them.

Donnelly spends much of his time "representing" Mosley at Grand Prix events around the world, although what this involves nobody is quite sure. What is known, however, is that he gets a lot of money for it, and is estimated to have earned around 11 million euros (£7.5m) in the three years up to 2004. But while FIA pays these vast sums under a contract with Sovereign Strategy Ltd, there are no signs in the company's accounts that it receives any money from them, suggesting that Donnelly receives them personally. Doubtless Jack Cunningham and the other directors know what's going on; but members of FIA's governing council are said to be indignant about a contract that they had no say in and that appears to be very generously priced to say the least.

Flouting standards on lobbying and unusual contracts are, however, no barrier to access to the heart of "new" Labour. For a suitable fee of a few thousand pounds Geordie MP Alan Milburn spoke at a Sovereign Strategy conference during his first break from the cabinet, while former defence minister Lewis Moonie has recently become an associate director of the firm. The party has also been happy to accept more than £80,000 in donations from Sovereign in the last four years, making it Labour's third largest corporate donor.

Not long before he gave Mosley the news that he could continue to beam fag adverts into the country's living rooms from outside the EU, in January this year Richard Caborn himself was guest of honour at a dinner hosted by Sovereign at Durham County Cricket Club in support of, er, London's 2012 Olympic bid.

Sovereign's website makes no secret of how it achieves results for its clients: "Our team's considerable hands-on experience and contacts are brought to bear." Or, as Bernie Ecclestone puts it in a glowing testimony: "While many professional advisers make claims – Sovereign delivers." Who could disagree?

ASBESTOS CONTAMINATION

Crush test dummies

IN MARCH we highlighted the flaw in a plan by Countryside Properties to build 650 homes on the site of the world's largest asbestos textile factory in Rochdale: predictably, the 72-acre site was riddled with asbestos.

Countryside, chaired by John Prescott's beloved Alan Cherry CBE, claimed at first that there was no contamination, stating in a planning application in December that "of particular note was the absence of any asbestos contamination" on the site. Then the company changed its mind, saying it was only on the land in the north of the site.

The *Eye* has now seen evidence to the contrary from the Institute of Occupational Medicine and the Health and Safety Executive that was issued in April. Yet Countryside has continued to tiptoe round the truth.

On 12 May, at a meeting in Rochdale, Countryside Properties director Ian Simpson was asked about the asbestos. He batted the question over to a spokesman for Encia, a firm of environmental consultants hired by CP. "Regarding the crush material, we've had it tested for asbestos," he replied. "And, er, those results have come back negative." What Rochdale's concerned locals didn't know was that Encia was referring only to a single pile of rubble on the site, nicknamed "crush", and not the contamination in the rest of the site.

Next, on 17 May, CP told a reporter from BBC *North West Tonight*: "All the asbestos there has been capped underground." But the site has never been clay capped and in a separate HSE laboratory test in April it was revealed that of the eight samples taken of the rubble, three were positive for up to 1 per cent asbestos content.

Then on 26 May the line changed again, though only slightly. Countryside told Radio 4's *You and Yours* programme: "86 bore hole tests have been completed on the land and only one has proved positive." But this was inaccurate too, and not only because of the HSE test results. There have been 87 samples taken on the site – but as CP's website states, only 64 of these are boreholes, the other samples being trial pits and window samples. And by this stage there were a further four positive asbestos samples never mentioned by Countryside but referred to in the IOM report that Encia had commissioned.

Indeed, three months after the IOM report was published, the website still stated that there was just one proven area of contamination on the development land. This was again inaccurate. Not one of these statements given by Countryside showed the genuine extent of contamination.

In fact, three tested examples of asbestos contamination in the crushed rubble were identified by the HSE, four examples were found by the IOM, and one of these – from "trial pit 222", shown in our photo – was 13 times over the recommended limit for hazardous waste. Another was 23 times over the limit. Encia have even found toluene, ethyl benzene and xylene in groundwater and soil.

Countryside Properties maintains that "through sharing information we will also build trust and understanding". But when the *Eye* asked why it did not explain the full extent of the contamination months ago, it declined to comment.

OIL TRANSFERS

Falmouth at Bay

PLANS by Falmouth harbour commissioners (FHC) to allow ship-to-ship transfers of crude oil to take place in Falmouth Bay (*Eyes passim)* have taken a giant leap forward.

At a meeting of the management forum of the Fal & Helford Special Area of Conservation (SAC), of which FHC is a member, English Nature representative Roger Covey argued that as the Fal & Helford was an SAC, what is known as an "appropriate assessment" under the habitats regulations for new plans or projects would have to take place before ship-to-ship transfers begin.

The chair of FHC, Andrew Bell, responded by informing the meeting that Falmouth harbourmaster Mark Sansom "did not think that an appropriate assessment was necessary". Hitherto many had thought an environmental assessment, before transfers start, was a nailed-on certainty.

Without such an assessment the only requirement left to fulfil before oil transfers could begin would be to satisfy the Maritime & Coastguard Agency that the purely technical aspects of the operation could be undertaken, without any environmental considerations taken into account.

Environmentalists and those who rely on Falmouth Bay for work and leisure wonder whether FHC will give the green light for transfers to start sooner rather than later.

The omens are not promising. Back in 2001 Sansom decided that FHC didn't need to do an appropriate assessment of the environmental effects before starting maerl dredging operations, a view not shared by English Nature (maerl is a rare coral which was sold for use as fertiliser – see *Eye* 1137).

Sansom was eventually forced to concede that he was wrong, the appropriate assessment was done and the bleedin' obvious was concluded, namely that maerl dredging was damaging the SAC, so FHC was obliged to halt extraction. The problem is that it took four years for this outcome to emerge from the painful bureaucratic deliberations of Defra. Indeed, if it hadn't been for an important legal ruling in the European court of justice which had a bearing on the case, it is likely those deliberations would still be on-going and FHC still profiting from maerl dredging.

Should oil transfer operations start in Falmouth Bay, it is more than likely that any legal challenge by English Nature and others will take several years of wrangling to produce a conclusion. Meanwhile FHC would be able make a tidy sum from the ship-to-ship transfers – as long, of course, as the special area of conservation is not devastated by an oil spill first.

HOUSING

The plot thickens

TWO businessmen have hit on a highly profitable way to cash in on the hunger for "affordable" housing… by selling off "self-build" plots of land on greenfield sites which may never receive planning permission.

Andrew Smith, a former Lib Dem Surrey county councillor, and Godfrey Chappels, a former Lib Dem member of Woking borough council, are directors of development companies United Plotowner Associates Ltd (UPA) and UK and International Land Sales and Development Limited (ILS). Both claim to "provide investors and the general public with a means to purchase land with a high potential for planning permission".

The companies work simply: they buy a field in the green belt with no planning permission for, say, £100,000, sub-divide it into 200 building plots on sale for £5,000 a piece and market them as providing potential "self-build" housing for key workers. A tenfold profit for very little effort beckons. The company's website boasts: "With the massive expertise of the United Plotowners Associates Ltd, the sister company of ILS, we hope to change the way housing is built in the UK."

UPA, formed in 2002, has had talks with deputy prime minister John Prescott's office and has presented documents to his policy unit. Smith uses his local government background to claim that Prescott's plans to build millions of new homes will mean that the land he's buying up cheaply will some day be given planning permission. Desperate punters who can't afford houses, particularly but not exclusively in the home counties, are buying up the plots for self-build and sitting on the land in the hope that planning permission will one day be granted. But the plots are useless without planning permission – something that will not be forthcoming for years, if ever, in many cases. Nor do most sites have any services, road access or infrastructure.

UPA/ILS's showcase site is at Burpham Court, Guildford, near the A3, where more than 200 plots have been sold at prices averaging £5,000. Yet not one has planning permission. A Guildford borough council spokesperson told the *Eye*: "[This site] is within a green belt area of land. To date, no planning applications (including applications for a change of use) have been lodged with Guildford borough council for the land at this address. Any new applications are assessed on their own merit. However, current green belt policy restricts residential development. There is an Article 4 direction on the site, which restricts permitted development rights to erect fences, eg divide fields into visually smaller plots."

ILS's website boasts that features include "utilities through the site and nearby electricity, water, gas, sewerage, telephone etc", which sounds good until one realises that "through the site" may mean no more than a line of telephone poles across a field.

At Hodnet, near Telford in Shropshire, ILS has been offering one-acre "pine forest plots" for just under £4,000 each – a bargain if planning permission were ever to be granted. But the local planning authority, North Shropshire district council, last year put up a notice warning potential buyers: "It is the understanding of this authority that this land has been sub-divided into plots and sold for possible development. This land is not deemed suitable for further residential development in the North Shropshire Local Plan. Any planning application would be a significant departure from the local plan and would not be supported by the local planning authority. Any unauthorised development will lead to enforcement action being taken against the owner of the land. This could lead to a substantial fine."

Since then the Hodnet site has also become subject of an "Article 4 direction" from the office of the deputy prime minister. The council's spokesman tells the *Eye*: "Such a direction is used to protect areas of outstanding interest from development – in this case an ancient woodland. It is inconceivable that development will ever be allowed here because it is such an unusual and important site."

Perhaps Shropshire's aspiring self-builders should ask for their money back. The *Eye* attempted to contact ILS managing director Andrew Smith for comment but he did not return calls.

RYANAIR

Fly-tipping?

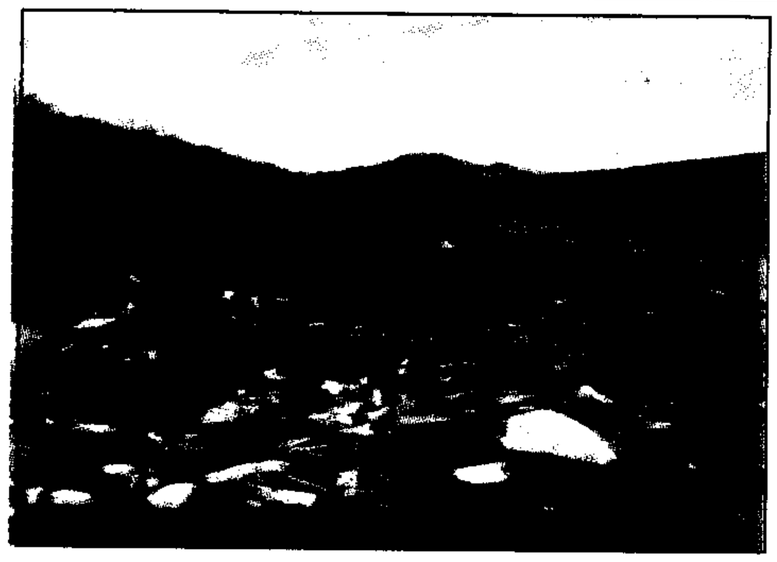
THOSE strolling beside Fife's Methil docks in Scotland may be forgiven for thinking there has been some dreadful air disaster.

Scattered along a rather isolated part of the docks are parts of an airliner – bits of seat, breathing masks, fuselage, sick bags and in-flight mags – from a Ryanair 737-200.

Or is Ryanair in the business of chopping up its old aircraft and fly-tipping the bits around the country's more remote regions, presenting a hazard for people and wildlife who venture upon it?

We sent pictures of the debris to Ryanair, which told us it sold off all its old Boeing 737-200s last year to Autodirect Aviation LCC, an American outfit, for £10m. A number were then sold on for "tear-down" – ie spare parts.

So we forwarded the photographs to Diversified Aero Services Inc, Florida, who were to "tear-down" the planes at Prestwick, about 90 miles as the crow flies from Fife. A spokesman there said that they had arranged for a UK company to carry out the tear-down on their



behalf and crate it out to them.

He declined to give us the name of the company, but said he would be contacting it to check that the planes had all been properly disposed of. Anything not salvageable was usually passed on to waste disposal companies. After careful examination of the photographs, he said the only thing that could definitely be identified as something from the Ryanair Boeings was the literature. "It really looks like any old airplane junk that could have come from any dumpster," he said.

No doubt the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency will find out whose.

ALLIANCE MEDICAL

Double cheques

LAST JUNE, as part of Labour's drive to transfer NHS duties to the private sector, health minister John Hutton awarded a £95m scanning contract to Alliance Medical. He claimed that private MRI scans would increase capacity and prove "good value for money".

The deal was certainly good value for Alliance and its parent company Bridgepoint Capital, which – by an eerie coincidence – was employing Alan Milburn MP as a £30,000-a-year consultant at the time when Milburn's old flatmate John Hutton awarded the contract. But it didn't turn out to be quite such good news for patients, especially as most of the scan images were sent abroad for analysis – leading to delays, language misunderstandings and mistakes in diagnoses.

"I think everyone acknowledges that it has been a complete disaster," Dr Gill Markham, chair of the BMA's radiology sub-committee, told the *Today* programme in February.

After early complaints about the quality of Alliance's work, the government appointed Professor Adrian Dixon of the Royal College of Radiologists as a "national clinical guardian" to monitor standards. According to documents obtained by the *Eye*, Prof Dixon's advice is that "because of anxieties concerning reports in the first few months of the contract, it would seem prudent that cases scheduled for surgery or similar intervention on the basis of an AML [Alliance Medical Ltd] report issued up to the end of 2004 should be discussed with the local radiology department."

In other words, scans carried out last year by Alliance now have to be double-checked by NHS radiologists – thus placing an extra burden on the health service's time and resources.

Alliance's failures haven't deterred ministers, however. In July, health secretary Patricia Hewitt announced a "choice of scans" programme whereby people waiting more than six months for various diagnostic tests – including MRI and CAT scans – will be able to go beyond their local provider and get a speedier service from private firms such as Alliance. But how speedy are they? In an audit of Alliance's work for the NHS, conducted in May, Prof Dixon discovered that although the company scanned patients more quickly, this advantage was sometimes lost because Alliance was then "twice as slow" to report the result.

In a direct comparison of Alliance's work with that of its NHS counterparts, Dixon noted that "the language was better in most NHS-generated reports", and that "clinical opinion was judged slightly better in most NHS reports".

The Royal College reacted to the audit by warning that Alliance is only "suitable for non-complex examinations". It added that NHS staff should keep a "clerical/governance" check on Alliance work to make sure that reports about "serious lesions" are spotted and fast-tracked.

The *Eye* asked the department of health if – and how – it would be funding all this extra double-checking work, but answer came there none.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

The camera never lies?

CONTRACTS released under the freedom of information act reveal that the department for international development (DfID) paid for a propaganda film to be made for broadcast in India to "explain the benefits and dispel the myths of privatisation".

DfID paid £93,000 to its chums at the Adam Smith Institute (ASI) in 2001 to support production of the 25-minute film, which was shown on national television. The contract notes that the aim of the film is to show the merits of privatisation "so that attitudes and perceptions of privatisation change and there is a more conducive environment for taking forward necessary privatisations across India".

The money is part of the more than £28m given by DfID to consultants from the right-wing think-tank between 2001 and 2004 (see *Eye* 1115). Most of it has been spent promoting privatisation through advice and training to governments in some of the world's poorest countries, including Tanzania where DfID (ie UK taxpayers' money) was spent on a pop song in Swahili on the joys of, er, private investment (*Eye* 1135).

Meanwhile DfID is fretting about those pesky aid agencies and NGOs putting a spanner in the works of the Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA) negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The purpose of the negotiations is trade liberalisation – the dropping of import tariffs in order to "open up markets".

A leaked document from the department reveals worries that NGOs, particularly Oxfam, War on Want and Christian Aid which are already outspoken critics of WTO policy, could try to derail the process. So a PR offensive is needed, but according to the document there is a problem: "The difficulty to produce clear cut examples of the benefits of liberalisation."

By contrast there are plenty of examples of the problems caused when developing economies drop tariffs. For instance, when Côte d'Ivoire cut tariffs in 1986, its local chemical, textile, shoe-making and car assembly industries were virtually wiped out. World Bank "structural adjustment" (aka tariff dropping) in the 1990s decimated industries in Cameroon, Malawi and Tanzania. In Ghana, unemployment rocketed as import competition devastated local manufacturing industry.

In the desperate hunt for evidence supporting the policy, DfID plans to commission "senior experts" from international development think tanks, universities and other research bodies to write briefing papers. These will then be published, not as the voice of DfID but as independent thinking "made available to the public and issued in the author's or affiliated organisation's name and will be presented as opinion pieces".

RIO TINTO

Mine of information

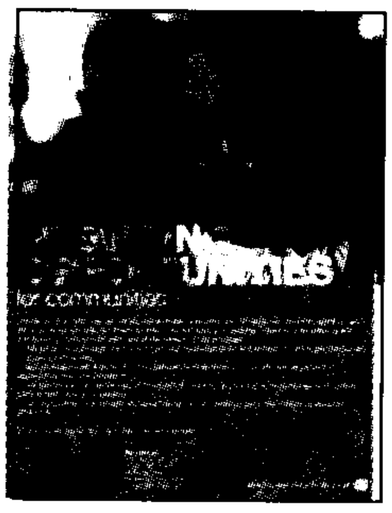
THE FULL-PAGE advertisements that mining company Rio Tinto has been taking out in various magazines recently have all sounded nice and cuddly.

"A soft touch for the environment" and "Providing opportunities for communities" are just two of the captions accompanying cheesy images of happy folk living alongside mine developments. The company's latest corporate video depicts elephants, whales, giraffes and children brushing their teeth in clean water, as the words "We respect the natural environment" appear on the screen.

Back in the real world, meanwhile, Rio Tinto has just announced that it is to go ahead with a titanium dioxide mine in Madagascar, where locals and international environmental campaigners have been fighting the scheme for more than a decade.

To extract the mineral, used as a whitener in paint, paper and toothpaste, Rio Tinto's subsidiary QID Fer et Titane will remove coastal forest, damaging the island's unique eco-system. It will then dredge hundreds of millions of tonnes of mineral sands along a 6,000 hectare strip of coast. Rio Tinto has promised to "rehabilitate" the environment but there are grave doubts as to how effective such restoration will be – especially given how many species in the area are already on the brink of extinction.

A Friends of the Earth report last year noted: "Some 4-6,000 people live in the forest area designated for clearance, with many practising subsistence farming. Local fishing is also at risk, as the mining operations could affect the salinity



of nearby Lake Ambavarono." A major mining development is also likely to ruin potential tourism income for the area.

As for that lovely clean water, Energy Resources Australia, another Rio Tinto company, pleaded guilty in May to water contamination after mistakenly connecting a tube carrying water used in the processing of uranium to a drinking supply used by workers, 28 of whom suffered poisoning symptoms. Anyone who believes Rio Tinto is an environmentally friendly firm is, indeed, clearly "a soft touch".

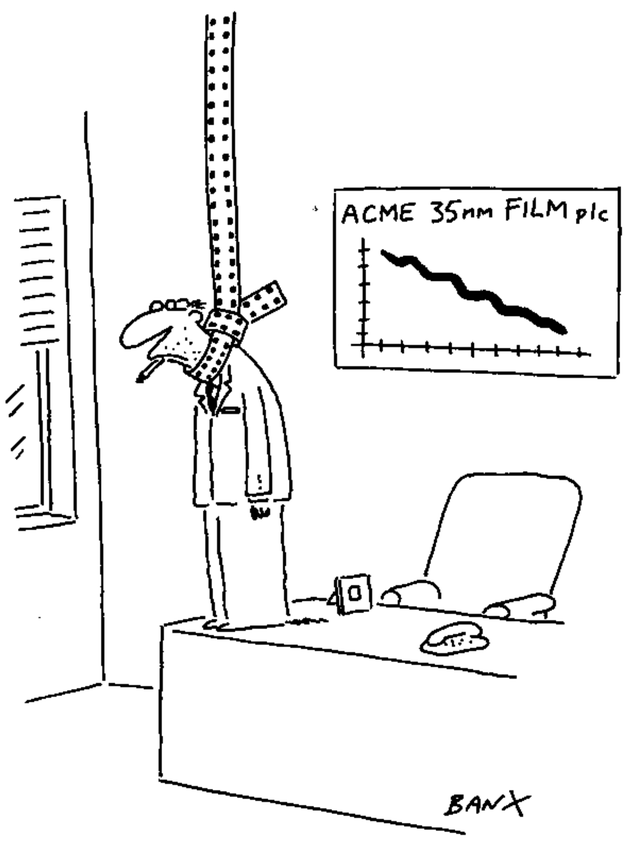
You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

CLEARLY determined to show – as the new sheriff in town – that it wants to drive out any big, bad bean counters, the Accountancy Investigation & Discipline Board has burst in on MG Rover, rule books and audit standards blazing.

At a meeting on 14 July the AIDB decided it would launch an as yet unannounced investigation to decide whether Deloitte & Touche, which audited the books for the Phoenix Four, from the get-go in 2000 until administration in April this year, has been guilty of any misconduct.

The investigation is to examine the advice provided and audits carried out by Deloittes of Phoenix Venture Holdings (the parent company of chairman John Towers and his three partners, who may or may not have "fiddled" but certainly enriched themselves while the car company burned) for the periods 2001 to 2003; MG Rover Group for the four periods 2000 to 2003; and Techtronic (2000), the company that initially acquired MG Rover from BMW and with it the £427m cash legacy, for the same four periods. It will also probe the non-audit services provided by Deloittes to Phoenix, its directors and its associated companies over the period from 2000 to 2005.



This followed the report compiled by the Financial Reporting Review Panel (FRRP) – like the AIDB, an arm of the Financial Reporting Council accountancy regulator – into the MG Rover situation which resulted in the June decision by the Department of Timidity & Inaction to appoint inspectors to investigate the collapse of the car company.

The FRRP report raised a number of concerns about the MG Rover accounts so it is not surprising that the FRC should have decided this was a matter for its AIDB watchdog.

The wide scope of the investigation suggests the AIDB will be looking into where the MG Rover cash flows and assets went and how they were accounted for by Deloittes in accounts which raised no queries or alarms – despite subsequent claims of substantial "black holes" and at the death liabilities of £1.37bn against assets of only £80m after paying off secured creditors. No wonder there may be questions about whether Deloittes were right to continue to suggest that the car group was solvent for several months before the collapse – based, it appears, on Towers' constant promise of a Chinese rescue that came too late.

As well as issues of disclosure and meeting audit guidelines, the probe may examine questions of tax avoidance and how funds flowing into Techtronic and Phoenix were used to pay overly generous pensions and salaries to the Phoenix Four while MG Rover lost millions.

Techtronic charged the MG Rover companies it owned interest for the dowry BMW had provided interest free. This enabled dividends to then be paid up to its parent Phoenix which were available to benefit Towers & Co.

Further dividends of more than £34m were paid up to the parent company by the two vehicle/aircraft/equipment-leasing companies Phoenix bought from its bankers Barclays in 2002 and 2003, providing another useful source of funding. The two leasing companies only cost just under £20m – an amount that was then written off. These deals would appear to have been tax driven. The Phoenix accounts note that the dividends were made possible by the payment of "an arrangement fee and arose from the surrender of tax losses not previously recognised in the accounts". Leasing is a big tax avoidance device.

Like Towers and the rest of the My Greed Gang who extracted more than £30m, Deloittes did very well out of MG Rover. The auditors were paid £6.2m for services rendered to Techtronic during its £10 takeover from BMW. Over the next two years they were paid another £3.9m (including £1.9m for work on the acquisition of Phoenix Venture Leasing), plus £900,000 in audit fees. For 2003 the Deloitte take was £900,000 for "other services" plus another £1.1m for work on the acquisition of Phoenix Venture Leasing 2. Oh, and the little matter of the £500,000 audit fee. So over MG Rover's brief and sad life, Deloittes collected £500,000 a year or £2m for making the numbers add up (sic) but a wallet-warming £12.1m for other services.

Deloittes has explained these "other services" as "corporate finance advice and due diligence work on the purchase of assets". Nice work indeed when you can get it as a result of being the auditor. Fees which might perhaps make auditors less finicky about how guidelines were interpreted or bent or what wording or facts were used or omitted when it came to disclosure?

Deloittes will no doubt refute any such suggestions. It has consistently declared confidence in "the opinions given in the financial statements".

Given the storm surrounding the MG Rover collapse, even after the Chinese partial rescue of Longbridge, and the DTI inquiry, it is not surprising the AIDB would not want to be seen to be doing nothing. Indeed, so keen was it to act that it quickly moved to prevent the Institute of Chartered Accountants from claiming any credit for the investigation of Deloittes.

The ICA wrote to the AIDB on 8 July, six days before its meeting, referring the MG Rover situation for investigation as it is entitled to do as Deloittes' professional body. However, the AIDB clearly wanted to be shown to be in sole charge.

So on 25 July the AIDB replied to the ICA saying it had decided to decline an investigation on the basis of the institute's referral. That same day the AIDB also wrote to the ICA disclosing that it was opening its own investigation into Deloittes!

Given that the AIDB's own rules seem to suggest it can only decline to investigate if there are not "important issues affecting the public interest" or no "misconduct", its refusal to accept the reference from the ICA seems bizarre and smacks of turf war. Especially as under the same provisions it has launched its own investigation because there clearly are "important issues affecting the public interest" and there "may have been an act of misconduct". What was wrong with sharing the decision with the ICA?

However, it would seem that the AIDB was able to seize on the point that the ICA, while it had referred Deloittes to the board, had not commenced its own disciplinary proceedings over MG Rover. So the AIDB quickly jumped to fill that regulatory vacuum and so will be able to claim all the credit come the announcement.

But its decision to reject the proposed reference from the ICA could give Deloittes' lawyers grounds for challenging the AIDB's own action on the basis that one minute it was saying there was no public interest and the next it was saying there was! Bean counters – don'tchajustlov'em?

MG ROVER makes for more unhappy times for Deloittes and those who head its UK partnership, chairman Martin Scicluna and chief executive John Connolly.

There are the multi-billion dollar law suits generated by the spectacular collapse of another client – the Italian food group Parmalat, probably the greatest financial fiction of modern times. The US courts last month refused to throw out the class action against the worldwide Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu organisation which claimed it was all the fault of the Italian Deloittes audit firm and nothing to do with them. Grant Thornton, Parmalat's auditor when the fraud began, failed with the same ploy.

The courts took the fair view that the Italian audit firms sold their services on the basis of being part of a worldwide network which enabled

MINISTER, I'M WORRIED ABOUT WHERE THESE FUNDS MIGHT END UP.
AND RIGHTLY SO OLD BOY.
THEY GO TO THE POWERFUL BARONS WHO DOMINATE THE REGION!
OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT REVIEW
IT'S OK - HE SAYS WE GET THE CASH!
97.

them to deal with Parmalat's operations around the world, including the UK. That gave them clout over smaller firms. Now that clout is coming back to whack the worldwide partnerships bringing with it the prospect of huge levies in the UK and elsewhere to pay the ultimate huge Parmalat compensation bill.

Meanwhile Scicluna and Deloittes face the prospect of a further drubbing over their failures to do the right thing at casino group Capital Corporation back in 1996! The Joint Disciplinary Scheme, the AIDB's predecessor as the bean counters' regulator, has accused the firm of acquiescing in misleading statements to the stock exchange and failing to resign as auditors because of Capital's failure to disclose that Deloittes was unable to form a view as to whether the 1996 interim accounts were correct.

Scicluna personally is accused of failing to report to the ICA, or to ensure Deloittes reported, his fellow former partner Stephen Ives who audited Capital. Ives was expelled from the ICA last November after a JDS investigation for hiding the fact that he had fraudulently received a Range Rover, the cost of which was offset against Deloittes' fees, from Capital.

Remarkably Deloittes last February tried to gag the JDS from announcing that it was even bringing a case against Scicluna who denies any wrongdoing. This, it argued, was a breach of confidentiality among other injustices. The public had no right to know the chairman of a major firm was under investigation. Clients would have to be told. There appeared in Deloittes' blinkered view to be one rule for chairmen and another for mere auditors. Its chairman should only be named if he was shamed by a finding of wrongdoing. So much for open justice and regulation!

Thankfully in April Mr Justice Laddie treated this as the self-serving nonsense it was and refused to ban publication. "There can be no doubt that the JDS is a scheme designed to foster public confidence in the way in which accountants and auditors perform their tasks… It seems to me that this explains why disclosure to the public at large is appropriate. Mere disclosure to the Joint Disciplinary Tribunal would do nothing in the short term to convince the public that the professions were taking seriously the supervision of their members".

That Connolly should support the sensitive Scicluna in his hour of need is no surprise. He knows what its like to be on the receiving end of the JDS' hammer.

Ten years ago he was reprimanded and ordered to pay £40,000 costs over his role in the Barlow Clowes scandal. He was Touche's top man in the North of England and involved in the audit of the James Ferguson company into which Barlow Clowes was reversed. The JDS found his professional efficiency, conduct and competence fell below the standard expected.

But despite such a recommendation he went on to become chief executive. So the "professional stigma" so feared by his chairman seems to have had little impact on his career or income which last year rose 27 percent to a mere £3.6m.

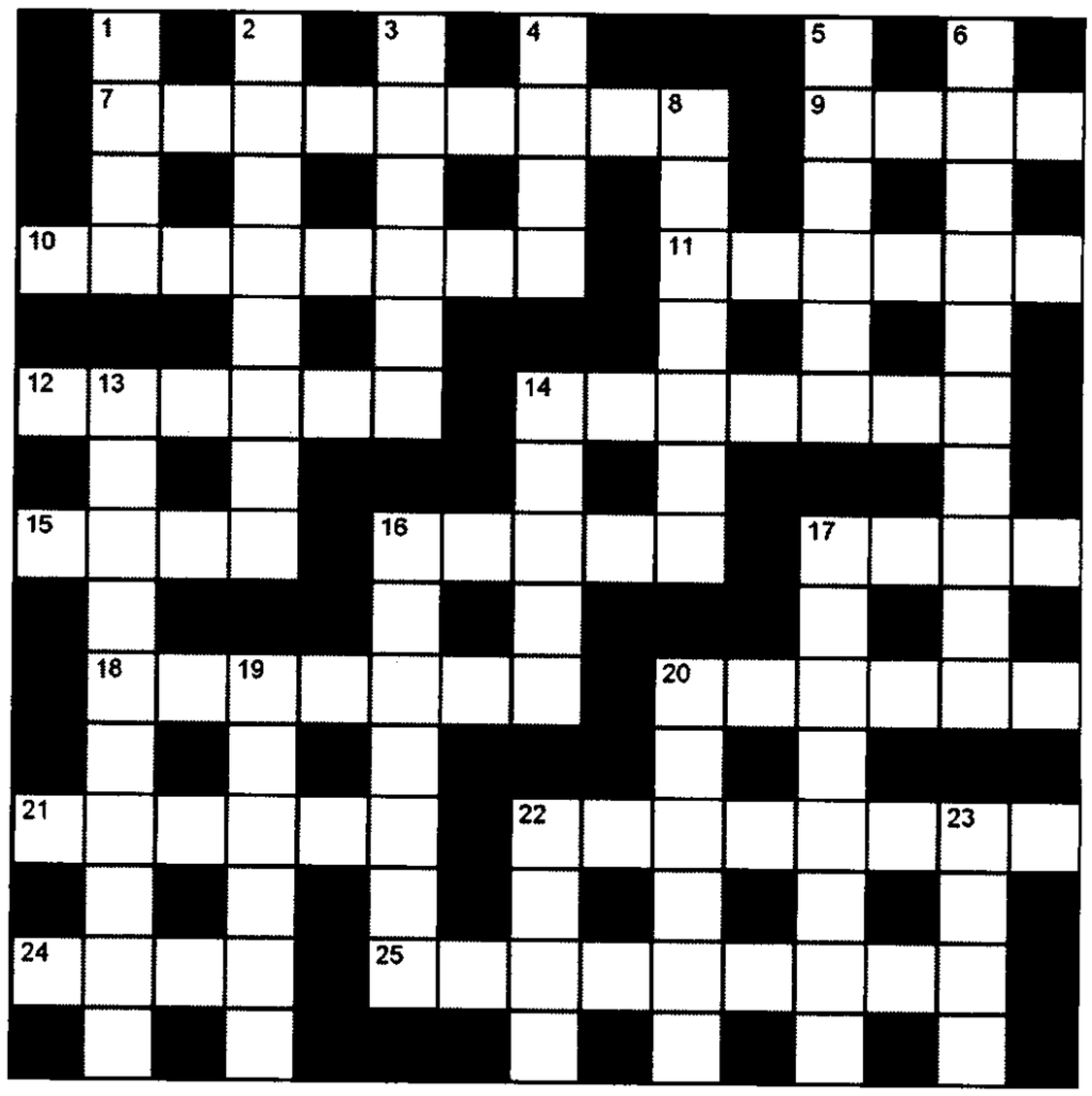
CHELSEA starts its defence of its Premiership title with another £150m injection from owner Roman Abramovich. Chelsea Limited, the ultimate UK parent of the soccer club, subscribed that amount in May for new shares in Chelsea FC, the former parent Chelsea Village that he acquired in 2003. Chelsea FC in turn owns the soccer club.

Unless this is the conversion of an existing loan, that £150m takes to at least £480m the amount pumped into Chelsea FC by the Russian oil tycoon through Chelsea Limited of which he is the sole shareholder. When the amounts paid for players since last June – more than £100m – are added, this suggests that Abramovich's total spending at Chelsea will soon top a staggering £600m if it has not already done so. And the team still struggled to beat little Wigan – once rescued by the man who sold Chelsea to Abramovich, Ken Bates.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 294

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 12 August 2005

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

7/18 Only an arsehole could produce such conspicuous wealth? (9,2,5)

9 Shaft does away with Head of Sexual Intercourse (4)

10 US military prison requires means of identification attached (8)

11 Archer would let them go removing top from graves (6)

12 Fairy but no queen (6)

14 Grope and come together on a high (5,2)

15 Perhaps a diminutive circus performer finds a "feel" pointless, weird (4)

16 See 4dn.

17 Bloody thick thing joins Conservative crowd (4)

18 See 7ac.

20 Smart arse's rude craft: going topless (6)

21 Lazy git's mistimed glance, perhaps, taking in Venus's top (6)

22 Maybe monosodium glutamate is like coke decarbonised (8)

24 Royal, pissed, drops outside recording (4)

25 A snide get, maybe this is how Gordon Brown sees himself after the Prime Minister?

DOWN

1/20dn. Canary Wharf residents here must be barking? (4,2,4)

2 That old queen, David's partner (8)

3 "Are you thinking what we're thinking"? ("Hard work securing a gain finally") (6)

4/16ac./22dn. "Her" panties in a twist (in drag) (4,2,3,4)

5 Trust Archer to abandon being less inclined to lie – formality (6)

6 Some are satisfied with their input to such a stand-in model of inflation (4-2,4)

8 Bill gets monumental erection around third of interns (7)

13 Throw up on "getting engaged" lecture (10)

14 Sexy female who's willing to have child with Conservative? There is no alternative! (5)

16 Ringo's pissed, Eddy's half cut (7)

17 A dose? Put gin on balls (8)

19 "I've screwed around with Kate, endlessly" (in pictures) (6)

20 See 1dn.

22 See 4dn.

23 Contend with wanker's first eyeful (4)

Crossword 293 winner: REBECCA SMITH

ACROSS: 1 Sprat 4 Judicial 8/6 Leadership contest 9 Naff 10 Tel Aviv 11 Smelly 13 Cigs 14 Think-tank 17 Climb down 19 Atop 22 Nassau 24 Tyranny 25 Brno 26 The Vatican 27 Clitoris 28 Hunch.

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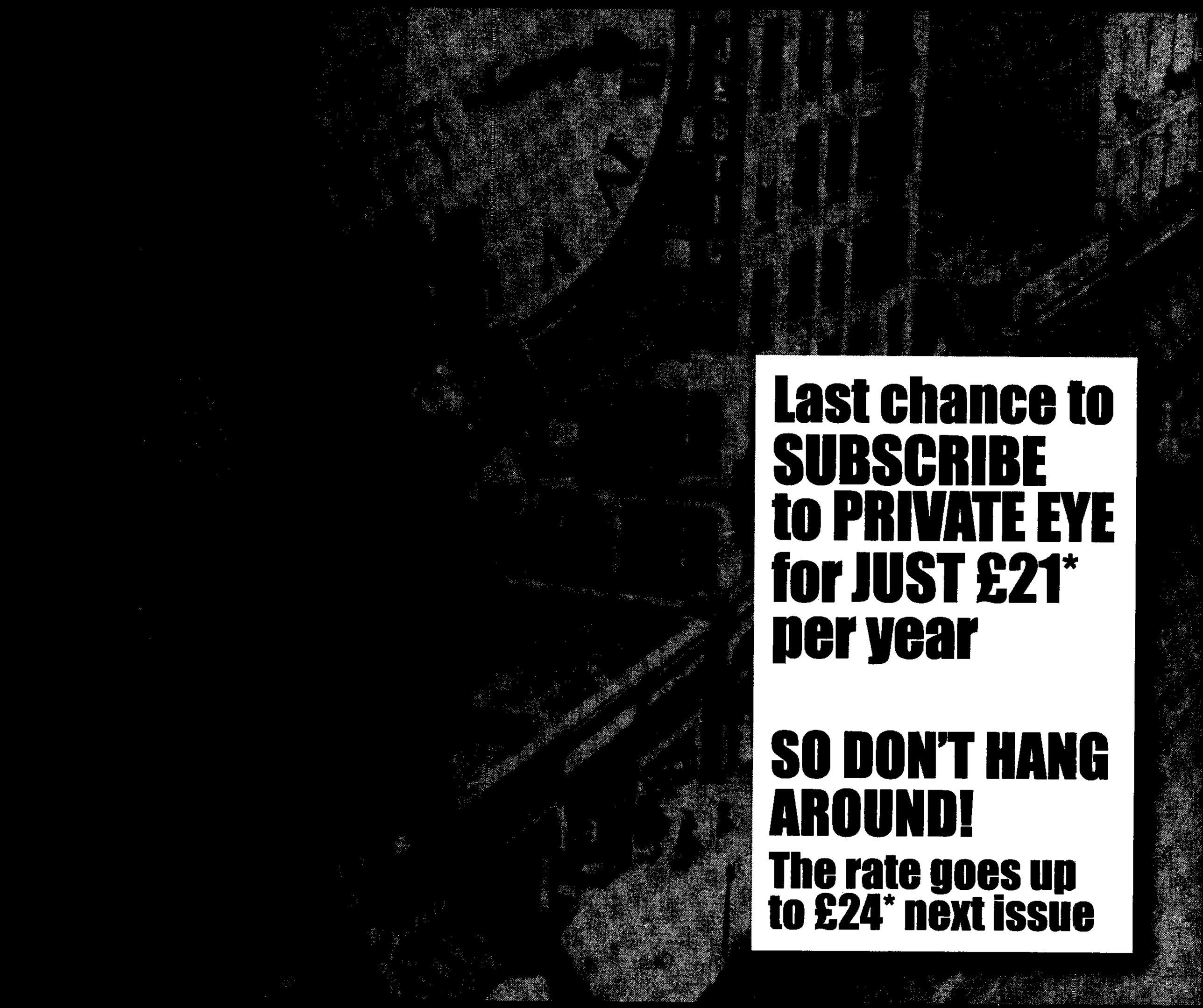

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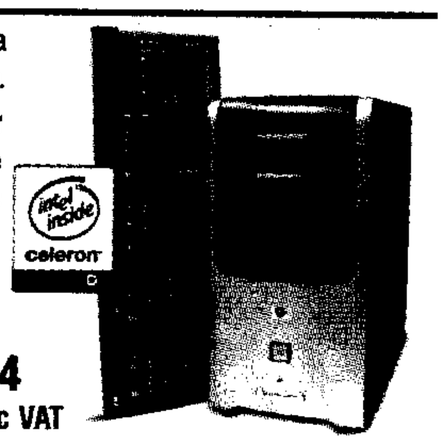

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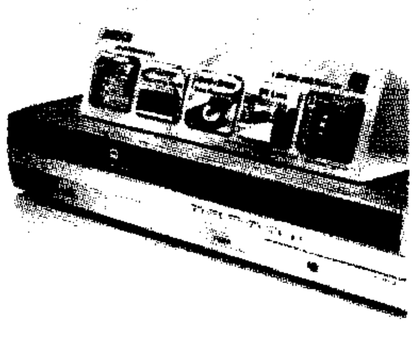

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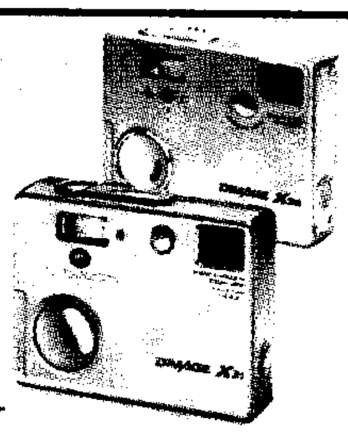

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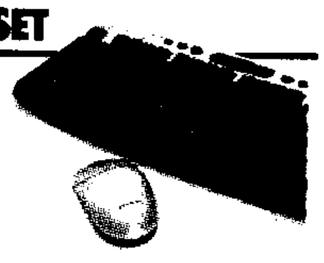

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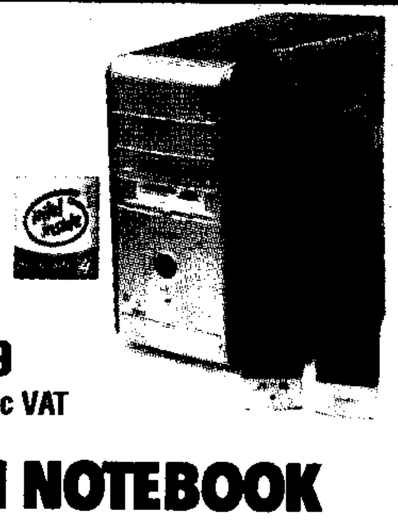

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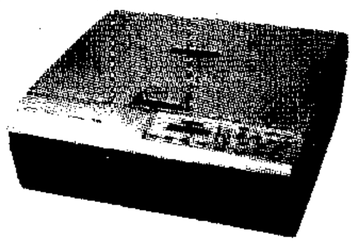

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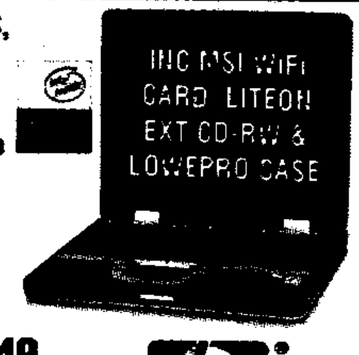

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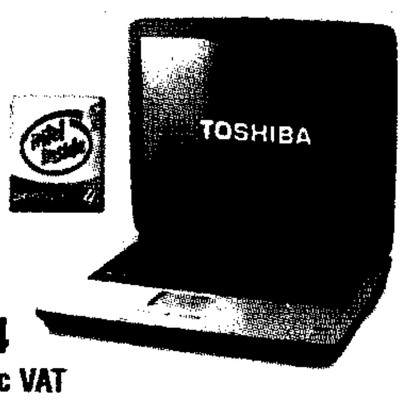

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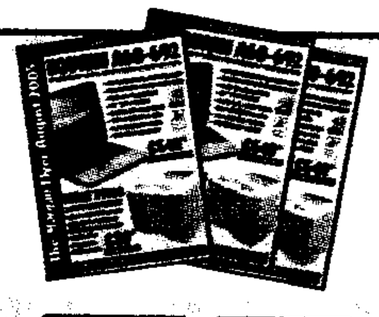

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HARD-WORKING DAD, divorced, in serious debt. House about to be repossessed. Any help humbly welcome. S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 32563825.

50K DEBT having guaranteed ex-partner's business failure. S/C: 11-66-22. A/C: 00065217.

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PLEASE HELP: hardworking female, with a great business idea, needs £40K to achieve goal. Many thanks. Halifax, S/C: 11-12-31. A/C: 00035982.

RUSSIAN FEMALE PhD student needs help with fees to finish research on Art and Politics; grateful for any aid. S/C: 11-05-05. A/C: 00465373.

BRITISH FAMILY needs help for school fees. Let down badly by local council and don't want 13-year-old daughter to attend state school with dreadful reputation. £50,000 needed for next five years: genuine plea for help. Halifax, S/C: 11-00-44. A/C: 00790809.

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CHRONIC CROHNS DISEASE sufferer desperate to reduce debts of £11K: stress is aggravating condition, please help. SC: 30-94-28. AC: 12497768.

YOUNG NURSE, recently left job to care for elderly parents. Please help. BOI, S/C: 30-11-70. A/C: 68019445.

SINGLE MOTHER of autistic son wants to buy a barge to provide a better life for him. Donations to: Nationwide, S/C: 070030. A/C: 62147257.

COUPLE DESPERATE FOR IVF. Working, but no savings, biological clock ticking. Any amount a blessing. S/C: 20-11-74. A/C: 20350850.

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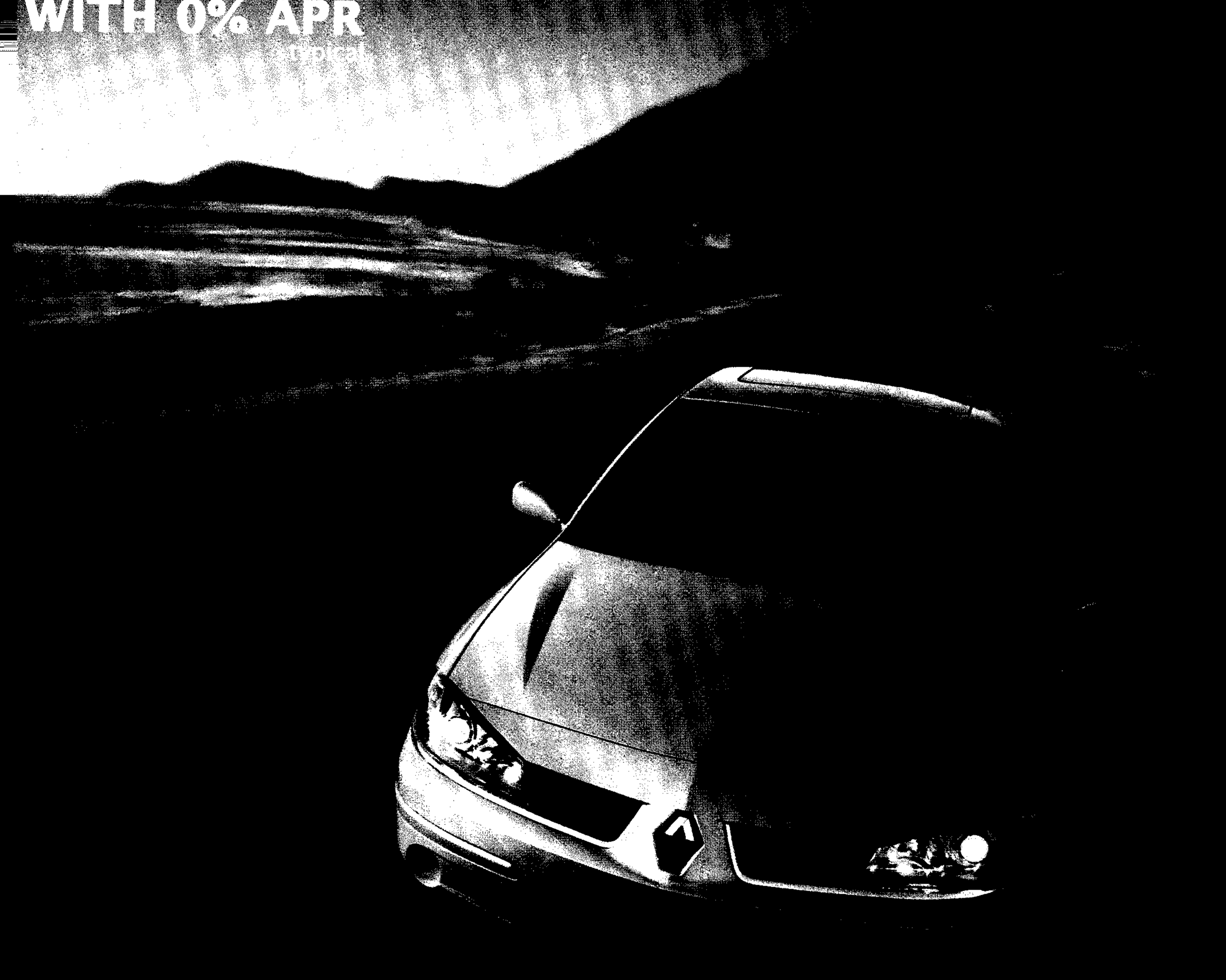

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